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THE ISLAND  
FORBIDDEN  
TO MAN 2 2



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THE ISLAND  
FORBIDDEN  
TO MAN ✕ ✕

By MURIEL HINE

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To  
NORMAN WALKER  
in lasting friendship, and admiration  
for his unforgettable  
*LOONA*

*First printed February 1946*

This book is produced in complete  
conformity with the authorised  
economy standards

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## PROLOGUE

1928

THEY had been mounting steadily, leaving the lonely glens behind, and on the top of the ridge a cry broke from Sybil:

"The sea!"

There it lay below them, the colour of a purple grape under the darkened sky, where already, stars were beginning to glimmer.

Janet smiled at her friend's excitement.

"Now you'll be happy! Though it doesn't seem to bring us any nearer food and a bed. We ought to have stopped at that last inn."

For the first time since leaving London there was the old careless ring in her voice, and Sybil's heart lightened. In the freedom of this wild land Janet had forgotten her ruined career.

"We're sure to come to a fishing village." Mrs. Mappin steered the car carefully round a bend in the steep descent. "I don't care where I sleep. Do you?"

"Not a bit, and I'm famished!"

"That's the air!" They reached the coastal road, and Sybil pointed ahead. "There's a boat drawn up on that beach. We're coming to civilisation!"

"All the same, I don't believe it's the sea." Janet was peering across the water. "There's a dark line beyond."

"The arm of a loch, with a headland. I can smell the seaweed! And isn't that a cottage?" The whitewashed walls were becoming distinct against the hazy background. "Yes, it's a village, and there's a sign-board sticking out. Hurrah! I could do with a cocktail!"

"You'd better stick to 'whusky' here. Everyone seems to have gone to bed!"

But through the open door as they drew up came a thin stream of light and the growl of men's deep voices. Stiff from the long drive, they descended.

"What does one do?" Sybil asked. "Ring the bell, I suppose." Before she could find it a gaunt woman

appeared on the threshold, and stared at them silently. "Good evening! Could we have rooms for the night and a meal?"

"There's ane room wi' twâ beds. It's gey late for a meal, but there's cauld beef, mebbe." The landlady's disapproving glance passed on to Dr. Janet Vickers, slender and trim in her well-worn tweeds, measuring her quality. "Ye maun see it." She stood back for them to enter, and they passed the bar where all talk had ceased, eyes following them to the stairs. In the dim passage above, their guide opened a door. "Yon's it."

Bare but clean, Sybil decided, under its sloping ceiling, with two dormer windows facing the sea. She looked at Janet, who nodded.

"This will do nicely. What about the car?"

Tam would "tak' it roun'," and bring up the luggage. There remained the price of accommodation, settled to the woman's satisfaction, and a faint smile appeared when whisky was ordered. Sybil glanced at the grate, where peat was piled. It was colder indoors than out, and she shivered. Could they have a fire?

The landlady's response was to take matches off the mantel-shelf and drop on her knees. Wielding the bellows, she said over her shoulder with a note of affront that the beds were "well-airt." A bathroom? No. She would bring up some hot water when the big kettle boiled. Rising to her feet she hesitated, plainly troubled, and suggested they should have their supper before the fire. A "peety" to waste it.

Sybil agreed, and the sooner the better. Janet, surreptitiously, had been feeling the mattress of the double bed that faced the narrow one in the corner. They'd be needing a "licht," the woman remarked as she groped her way out. The door closed, and Sybil smiled at her companion.

"She doesn't seem very glad to have us! But it's better than sleeping in the car."

"If you don't mind a heather mattress?" Janet laughed at Sybil's expression. "It's all right! When you told me you were going off the beaten track I put in a tin of Keating's powder. Though I've seen enough of fleas in my time, and am a dab at catching them. The medical student's sport, waiting in poor maternity cases: a damp piece of soap does the trick!" Her voice was light, but

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the shadow had fallen again. She moved to the nearer window, and gazed out. "There's a light at sea. Or it may be on that distant headland?"

The landlady had reappeared with a lamp, and a cloth, which she spread on the round table flanking a horsehair sofa. She corrected Janet:

"Nay, fra' Rual Castle, on its island."

Here a rough-haired youth shambled in and plumped the two suit-cases on the floor. He seemed dazed by the size of his tip, but too proud to thank Mrs. Mappin, though he muttered something to the woman and they went out together.

"We'd better unpack what we need," Janet suggested, and glanced at the other's pale face. "You rest, my dear, and I'll see to it. You ought to have let me drive the last lap. Try the sofa—but don't go through! All the same, it's rather fun."

"It will be when we've had some food." Sybil drew off her hat and looked at herself in the spotted glass on the chest of drawers that did duty for a dressing-table. "I could eat an ox!"

"Well, there's beef, 'mebbe'! I don't care for the doubt."

Supper, however, was better than they had expected, and they cheered up when the landlady placed bowls of steaming broth before them, from which rose a savoury smell, and a half-finished sirloin. The first thing Janet did was to measure some whisky into a glass, add water, and hand it to Sybil:

"Drink this. You look dead-beat!"

"I'm not," she protested, but drank thankfully. "It's the old tiredness returning. It was a hard task settling everything after Luther's death, then selling the house and practice. Still, I'm free at last." Into the soft, brown eyes, a contrast to the firm lips, came a faint scorn. "The merry widow? But I can't pretend to grieve for him."

"You needn't to me," said Janet gravely. "I guessed long ago, before Marigold's birth. How is the dear mite? I forgot to ask."

"In her glory! At Worthing with Nurse and my cook. I simply couldn't part with her, though I've made no plans. I want a good rest from housekeeping before I start again."

"Very wise," Janet agreed. "You've not had much rest since I've known you."

"No, I've worked like a slave, keeping expenses down"—Sybil smiled mockingly—"and appearances up! My only luxury, Nurse. But I paid her wages out of the small allowance my father made me, and other things besides. Such as the petrol when Luther 'lent' me the car!"

"That's the limit!" Janet looked up from carving the beef. "But I knew he was mean."

"And what do you think I discovered? That he was a rich man all the time! He told me that half of our income went to old Dr. Thomson's widow, that he couldn't have bought the practice outright. A lie," Sybil said stonily. "Luther's father put up the money for it, a wholesale furrier in the City, and also left him a big sum. This legacy *after* our marriage, and I always believed he was an orphan! I can tell you, I've had some surprises, Janet. The greatest of all, that his parents were German."

"German!" Janet gasped. "Dr. Mappin?"

"Yes; they changed their name on naturalisation ten years before the war." Between mouthfuls of beef, Sybil continued, "It accounts for Luther's temperament, the old mixture of sadism and sentimentality, with a secret contempt for women. Only fit to bear children, and minister to a man's comfort!" Her voice rose. "Thank God he's dead!"

A short silence fell between them, sisters in adversity, for Janet had also suffered. The younger by two years, she did not look it, Mrs. Mappin, a handsome woman on the verge of the forties, with a fresh skin and, normally, a high colour. Her black dress modified the fullness of her figure, and she carried her head with an unconscious air of pride; the pride that had saved her from a broken spirit, reinforced at Marigold's birth after eight years of childlessness. Luther could no longer taunt her with this. He had cleverly concealed his vein of cruelty from his patients, under a charming manner. To women he had a mesmeric appeal, the big, blond man round whom the sisters at the hospital fluttered on his visiting day. Janet had never liked him, and the feeling was mutual, for he had resented the advent of a lady-doctor in the busy town, her cleverness and increasing popularity. So long as she confined her practice to the smaller tradesmen and the poor he had

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treated her with patronising indifference, to be annoyed when his wife had consulted her in the early days of pregnancy. From being a passive enemy he had become an active one when a county lady had followed suit, hearing that Janet was clever with children. Granton Abbey had been reopened after a lapse of years, and it was gall to Dr. Mappin to see Janet's car turn in at the lodge, the family in the old days on his predecessor's visiting list. From that hour he had watched, and plotted against, his rival, and fortune had played into his hands. Three months before this visit to Scotland the Medical Council had erased Janet's name in the Register, at the end of an action for divorce brought by a patient's wife, with Janet as co-respondent. Finished, at thirty-eight, after all her work and deep love for her profession, though innocent of the charge, condemned by a set of circumstances absurd but convincing to the London jury. Never could she practise again.

Throwing off the bitter memory, Janet laid another thin slice of beef on Sybil's plate.

"You must eat this, to keep me company. It's excellent!"

"Scotch beef," Sybil murmured absently. "It's so nice to talk to you again. We couldn't at the hotel last night, or in the car. Somehow, I can't when I'm driving."

"Same here," said Janet, aware of what the words covered. Both had been conscious of strain, with the thought that it might be wiser to ignore the past, but now in this humble room and new sense of intimacy the barrier had broken down. Janet asked abruptly: "I hope you've come in for Dr. Mappin's money?"

"I have, apart from handsome bequests to the hospital and other local charities, with what is tied up for Marigold when she comes of age or marries. It was a great surprise to me. I'd really expected very little, Luther insisting that Marigold must learn to work." Sybil looked across at Janet, to see her disgust. "I remember him one evening playing Beethoven, the sentimental tears in his eyes, to swing round at the final chord and say: 'I might leave you my piano. You could give music lessons.' And smile to himself. Then we went out to dinner, and he was the model husband. Just as well! I'd have hated pity, and especially, from my people, who did not approve



of the match. Although I think my mother was really relieved, her first thought my brother, in an expensive cavalry regiment. All the money they could spare went to him; the estate swallowed the rest. That was why Luther married me, to get a footing in the county." She saw Janet's disbelief. "It's true. He told me so himself, before we'd been married a year."

"The brute!" Janet exclaimed.

"It didn't matter. I'd ceased to love him." Sybil paused, then yielded to an impulse: "He wasn't the first! As a young girl I lost my heart to a neighbour's son, a hopeless affair; no money, no prospects." Bitterly, she added, "He let me down, too! The first thing I shall teach Marigold is never to trust a man. But I was really attracted by Luther, thought I could help him, and lead a useful life. I suppose I've been punished for marrying without being deeply in love?"

"Nonsense!" said Janet sturdily. "Half the girls do it from mixed motives, to get away from home, or have one of their own and children. They're often the happiest, saved disillusion. I'm inclined to think the French are wiser, knowing how quickly passion dies. It's a family arrangement, and the daughter starts on equal terms, thanks to her *dot*, is a partner as well as a wife. Far too many girls in this country have to go to their husbands for every penny, work hard without a servant's wages, besides bearing the children, and can even be charged with theft if they draw a small part of the housekeeping allowance. It's unfair! Like the lower pay doled out to women for doing a man's job, however efficient they may be. Men blamed us for holding on to these after the war." Janet's grey eyes flashed. "Having praised us to the skies for helping to win it! They should have blamed the employer, saving his pocket." She smiled suddenly at Sybil's serious face. "What a lecture! If you've finished let's have the landlady in to clear away, and settle down by the fire?"

"A good idea. Touch the bell, my dear, and put some more peat on."

Presently, when the sombre woman had carried off the tray and placed a crock of hot water in the fender, they moved the horsehair sofa to the cheerful glow. Janet fetched a pillow and tucked it behind Sybil's shoulders.

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"It's down! I didn't expect that."

"From the wild geese, probably. Get another for yourself. This is really very cosy."

"Yes." Janet's smile faded as she went on, "I'd sooner be here than in that big hotel last night. I know it's absurd, but when I wrote my name in the register I thought the clerk would recognise it."

"How could he?" Sybil asked gently, glad that Janet had broken the ice. "The case wasn't even reported in *The Times*. I looked—the paper my father takes in. We didn't expect him to live, with double pneumonia, and I never left the house until he passed the crisis, then I heard the verdict from a neighbour, a dreadful shock! By the time I got home—my mother is hopeless in illness—you'd gone. As I wrote and explained."

"How could I stay?" Janet broke out. "With all the town talking of me! I was lucky in getting rid of the practice so quickly, and I left everything else to the solicitors. A few real friends were kind, blamed Mrs. Chaytor, and called it a miscarriage of justice, but all I longed for was to escape." With frowning brows, she turned to Sybil. "What still puzzles me is how she knew she'd find us both at Whitsands." She read the distress in the brown eyes, but continued, "I've always suspected Dr. Mappin."

"You were right. I've been afraid to tell you," Sybil confessed in a strained voice.

"As if it made any difference! You couldn't help it." Janet slipped an arm round her friend and kissed her. "It's a relief to know who my enemy was."

"Dear Janet," Sybil murmured gratefully. "He only told me after the case—and without the slightest shame! It seems that Mrs. Chaytor wrote to him from Pourville for a copy of a prescription. With the excuse of losing her address he called at their house on his morning round, and asked for her husband. When the maid told him he was at Whitsands, Luther remembered you were there, and put in his letter to Mrs. Chaytor, 'You needn't worry about your husband overworking. He's at the Beach Hotel at Whitsands with his doctor, so she will look after him.' Deliberate mischief. I said I'd never forgive him." Sybil's voice sank. "I hadn't the chance. That night he was called to a patient at Cudsay, and on that

dangerous hill a lorry skidded, ran into the car and killed him."

"He didn't enjoy his triumph for long." Janet was silent for a moment, thinking what a difference it would have made had the accident happened before her visit to the sea. Then she straightened her graceful shoulders; it was no good looking back. "If you didn't read the case I don't suppose you know how it went. Shall I tell you?"

"Do. If you don't mind talking of it?"

"I'd rather. I've been so bottled up, and although I see Michael Chaytor in town we've let it slide. He blamed himself for everything, nearly had a nervous breakdown, though I think getting rid of his wife helped to cure him. A ghastly woman! Couldn't, or wouldn't, understand that for his brilliant writing he must have peace. She'd ask people to tennis or bridge, and expect him to play, make scenes when he refused to take her to parties, and would even tap on the window when he locked the study door! His life was a misery, her one idea social success. He was fairly loyal, but this slipped out, bit by bit. Did I tell you how we met?"

"No, though I heard he was a patient of yours through Luther, and was interested when they came to Hadbrook, as I'd always loved his work. I suppose you knew him in town?"

"Curiously enough, I didn't, as he used to visit a mutual friend. He had an accident in my road soon after their arrival. He was getting into a taxi, and an officious passer-by slammed the door on his fingers, a most painful thing. They were bleeding, so the driver pointed to my plate"—Janet smiled—"and said he 'couldn't do better'! I was in, having tea, and after I'd dressed his hand I gave him a cup, and we talked. It was like old times, someone from a wider world. He was worried over his injury, couldn't type and hated dictation, so he came in every day by bus, although it wasn't necessary. After that, as he was very run down, I gave him some electric treatment. When he was better he'd still turn up occasionally, at tea-time, for a chat. Someone intelligent to talk to, he said! Later, that horrid old cat next door testified to his frequent visits. I never guessed that his wife might be jealous, although when she developed 'flu she sent for your husband,

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said she didn't believe in women-doctors. Quite reasonable," Janet said dryly. "There was no cause for jealousy. From first to last Michael was a good friend, and nothing more." Her grey eyes searched Sybil's face. "You believe that?"

"Of course I do! You were much too keen on your work for any dangerous affair with a patient! I suppose he told you of Whitsands? I'd never heard of it before."

"Yes, a quiet spot where one needn't dress, could live on the beach. I was badly in need of a holiday that hot Whitsuntide, had no serious cases, and Dr. Jones said he'd look after my practice. So off I went. I'd heard that the Chaytors were at Pourville, so you can judge my surprise the first night when Michael strolled in and sat down at a distant table. He simply stared at me, then waved his hand. He was looking ill, and I scolded him, but he said it was only the heat wave, and that morning he'd decided to run down for a sea-breeze, and finish his book, the reason he'd called off Pourville. His wife had made a scene and gone there alone. Unfortunately, he hadn't told her of his change of plans. She would have said, 'If you can work at Whitsands you can work at Pourville!' The little hotel was half-empty after the holiday week, with no one who knew us, and it didn't seem to matter. We swam before breakfast, and then, save for a glimpse at lunch, we didn't meet until the evening, when I made him take a walk, or a spin in my car. One night he paused at my table to say, 'You won't see me to-morrow. I've reached the last chapter.' I warned him not to forget his meals, and he said impatiently, 'I'll have something sent up!' When I passed his door next morning I could hear the typewriter going. He had told me that at the end of a book he went full speed ahead. Better let him get it over and rest—if he could! Are you sure this isn't boring you?"

"No. It's making everything clear. Go on."

"It was a sultry night," Janet proceeded. "I stayed late on the beach as I knew my room would be hot. I could hear Michael still at work when I went up to bed, and I felt worried. Writers make bad patients, live too much on their nervous strength. Undressing, I heard thunder, and hoped the storm would break. There was a late arrival in the room opposite mine, voices and the thud of luggage."

As I didn't feel sleepy I read for a time, and then I must have dropped off, for the next thing I realized was someone tapping at the door. I got out of bed and opened it. There stood Michael, looking ghastly! He said, 'I'm ill. Could you——!' and collapsed. Luckily, I'd some brandy in my flask. I put him into an arm-chair and poured it down his throat. He was icy cold, with a fluttering pulse, so I lit the electric fire and wrapped a blanket round him. Over his pyjamas—Mrs. Chaytor's counsel raised the point: he'd been well enough to undress! Actually, he'd found them cooler to work in, had ordered up some sandwiches, and told the chambermaid not to disturb him. Dinner he'd forgotten entirely!"

"How mad! No wonder he was exhausted."

"So much so," Janet continued, "that he fell suddenly asleep, Nature's cure, and I wasn't going to disturb him, so I took up my book again, and as he was warmer turned off the heat. It was then three o'clock, with plenty of time to get him back to his room before the hotel stirred."

"But didn't you think of your own position?"

"Why should I, a doctor? It wasn't my first vigil beside a sick man. The storm returned, but Michael slept on, until there came a wind off the sea, and rain lashing the windows. He opened his eyes, bewildered at first, then apologetic, ashamed of his panic. He explained how, the book finished, he had felt something 'snap in his head.' Poor Michael!" Janet smiled. "Too vivid an imagination. But what would a novelist be without it? All the same, he had tried his strength too far. Bed was the best place for him, and he promised me to stay there next morning until I had seen him. So I looked out cautiously: a dim light and no one about. We had reached the corridor when the opposite door opened and out came Mrs. Chaytor!"

"What an awful position!" Sybil gasped. "She recognised you?"

"At once. Her lights were full on. At the same moment the night porter came round the head of the stairs." Janet's lips twisted. "A useful witness? It transpired later that a shutter loosened by the wind was banging about, and unable to reach it she had rung for him. When he didn't come she decided to fetch him. At least, that was her story. She started a scene, but I said my patient was ill, and explanations must wait for the

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morning. If only Michael had played up!" Janet smiled ruefully. "But, like many highly-strung people in a crisis, he pulled himself together, dismayed on my account, and met his wife's accusations. If he had fainted, or even leaned on the porter's arm, it would have been better for me."

"Yes, you poor dear! But surely, the Judge recognized that sex shouldn't enter into the question?"

"He seemed to think it a cut-and-dried case." Janet's voice was bitter. "It all went very quickly, after a bad start, our arrival on the same day, Michael by train, without his wife's cognisance. This wasn't easy to explain; he couldn't say she never gave him any peace! Mrs. Chaytor was the perfect injured wife, dressed quietly—and expensively—in black, with a make-up on the pale side. Her Counsel pointed out that she had renounced a happy London life to bury herself in the country for Michael's sake! If her parlourmaid hadn't written, she would never have known he was at Whitsands. Lonely at Pourville, she had decided to return and join him, arriving late, through a thunderstorm on the way. Then a clever feminine touch: she knew it was foolish, but she was afraid of lightning! From the first, she had the Judge's sympathy."

"Simply damnable!" Sybil exclaimed.

"It was. I'm certain if I had been a male practitioner he would have found it natural that an hysterical woman should seek my help. What is more," Janet added bitterly, "I'd have had the sense to ring for the chambermaid and cart the patient back to her room. But the Judge was an old man, and I guessed from the very way he spoke to my Counsel that he was full of the old prejudice against women adopting a man's profession, as it had been in his youth." Her eyes, lowered, fell on her wrist, and she started. "Do you know what the time is! Nearly twelve! We must go to bed."

Janet was the first to wake. A honey-coloured light from between the scanty curtains made a path across the uneven boards. Groping for her slippers she tiptoed to the nearest window, and drew a quick breath of pleasure. How lovely the fresh morning appeared! It was six o'clock, and mist still lay on the distant water, but nearer at hand

the sun pierced its blue depths, and the drifting seaweed below gave it emerald streaks. The fishing-boats were in, with men in faded jerseys cleaning them and spreading the nets to dry, brown against the shining pebbles. Beyond them women were busy gutting the fish, their skirts kilted over high boots, arms bared to the elbow. They threw the offal into a pool between the rocks, where gulls swerved and dived with shrill cries, their silver wings flashing. Leaning out, Janet could see on her right over a wall of roughly piled stones a cherry-tree in blossom, fairy-like against a barn, and a collie helping his master to turn a flock of sheep up the hill-side. She moved, and a loose board creaked, disturbing her friend's light slumber. Opening her eyes, Sybil saw the slim figure in the window recess.

"Good morning," she called. "Another fine day?"

"Yes,"—Janet wheeled round—"and a perfect picture! Come and see it; but put on your dressing-gown, or you'll shock the natives! Why don't you wear pyjamas?"

"I'm too large for them." Sybil threw back the bed-clothes. "Did you sleep?"

"Like a top! And you?"

"After a time, when I got used to the coarse sheets. You look like a boy standing there. Quite improper!" Sybil laughed.

It was true, for long ago Janet had adopted an Eton crop, its severity modified by her curly hair. Now, in the clear light, Sybil could see that the brown was flecked with grey on the temples. Poor darling! The bitter thought followed: Luther's work. However could she make up to Janet for what she had suffered? Sybil knew she was far too proud for any suggestion of help, although her income had stopped. Still, this holiday was a good start, and might be prolonged indefinitely. She joined Janet in the window.

"Oh, isn't it lovely? Look at those women on the beach! That girl with the red hair peeping out from under her black kerchief, chaffing a young fisherman. All working together; it's what you said last night, Janet, partners as well as wives. They're putting the boxes of fish into that boat with the out-board motor. I wonder where it's off to? What an animated scene, with the gulls swooping overhead."

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"And spring round the corner. Lean out, and you'll see the cherry blossom. I love this place! Couldn't we stay for a few days and explore?"

"We might," Mrs. Mappin responded. "There's no hurry, but perhaps, we'd better see first what breakfast is like. What time is it?" She was surprised when Janet told her, for it was lighter than in England. "We shall have to wait hours for hot water!"

"I don't think so. I'll dress and explore. So go back to bed and read the Bible! The only literature I can see."

A copy from some society lay on the chest of drawers.

"No, thanks!" Sybil said tersely. "I've done with religion."

"Then you'd better not admit it here," Janet warned her. "Or they'll be throwing stones at you, as they did at a friend of mine, who tried to bathe on the Sabbath!" Janet's grey eyes filled with mischief. "If we stay over the week-end I shall take you to kirk."

"That settles it," Mrs. Mappin retorted. "I must see about petrol."

She changed her mind, however, for Janet was enjoying herself, and breakfast a success, with porridge, freshly caught fish, scones and honey, the scent of the heather in it.

"I don't want anything better than this," she announced, in the little sitting-room that faced the bar.

Janet, earlier, had found the red-haired lass below, fish-scales still clinging to her skirt, obviously interested in the strangers, and quite ready to talk. She was on a holiday from her duties in the post office at Muss, a small town at the head of the loch, to give her aunt a hand. She had been in sore trouble, poor woman, the last of her sons drowned in a gale, the two others killed during the war. Alec had been her right hand since the landlord's stroke a year ago, which had left him partly paralysed. She couldn't get over the dear lad's death, though the minister said it was her duty, and the neighbours did all they could for her. Some had come in to sit with Uncle last night, on his birthday, the parlour full of tobacco smoke, and Auntie at her wits' end where to give the visitors supper.

Mrs. Mappin had been moved by the story of the silent



woman's struggle to keep a home together. They would stay, and ringing the bell Sybil arranged it.

"We must have a walk this morning," she told Janet. "But after lunch we could hire a boat and go out for a look at that castle. What did she call it?"

"Rual. I'd love to see it."

They climbed the rough slope that the sheep had taken, until they reached dry heather and bracken, where green crooks were beginning to pierce the russet litter.

"Stop! I'm breathless," Sybil cried.

Finding a smooth rock they relaxed, to drink in the wide view. The sun had dispersed the mist and they could see the island, with a cliff-like erection facing them.

"That must be the Castle, and isn't that thing sticking out a jetty?" Janet asked, narrowing her eyes. "There's a long shed on the other side, for boats, I suppose. I've always wanted to live on an island, like Compton Mackenzie, and write. That's my latest idea, and Michael Chaytor is helping me, though he makes me stick to short stories at present, which he reads and then points out the faults. He thinks I have a chance, if I let my imagination riot," —Janet smiled—"which for years I've been trying to suppress! I've seen a good deal of human nature, and you can't succeed as a doctor unless you study psychology. No one can teach another to write, he says, if they haven't the gift, only help by criticism. But I'm struggling on, hoping to have a story accepted, and then start on a novel."

"I think it's an excellent idea," Sybil said warmly. "Especially if you're fond of it?"

"I am, an early love. I was rather good with my school essays. Look!" Janet pointed over the dazzling water. "There's a boat coming away from the Castle. Yes, a launch!"

"It's turning now, going up the loch to Muss. For supplies, probably. I wonder what they do, cut off in stormy weather." Sybil drew her hat lower over her eyes. "Isn't it hot? If we hadn't ordered a boat we could have lazed on the beach and bathed."

"I don't expect the water is warm enough," Janet warned her. "Better not risk it." She laughed when Sybil suggested that Muss might provide a hot bath. "Still worrying over that? You'll get on very well without it. People soak too much nowadays, these girls with

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their cigarettes and cocktails. I can't say I admire the post-war generation, with its promiscuous habits. Michael is scared of the bright young things, says he'll dance with them, good copy, but refuses to sleep out every night in the week!"

Sybil laughed, then her face grew serious.

"I hope they'll improve before Marigold grows up."

"Give her a chance! She's only five."

"Six in July," Sybil corrected. "And not keen on making friends, quite satisfied with Nurse at present. Her only close friend is the gardener's boy! Most of mine live in the country, and since Luther would rarely lend us the car she missed the children's parties. She went to one in the town and summed it up as: 'Nice things to eat, but silly games!' And was very offended because someone told her not to be rough. I couldn't get to the root of this, except that a small boy had cried, to Marigold's disgust. She's rarely reduced to tears, wasn't even when Luther used to tease her, and tell her frightening stories. I didn't guess this, until she asked me if it were true that bogey-men came out in the dark! Nurse was furious, and after that always remained in the nursery when he went up to wish the child good night. But I used to worry about the future, his effect on her as a growing girl, though she didn't really care for him. Do you know what she said when I tried to explain that her father was dead? 'Blackie will be glad that he's gone away for a long time.' Blackie being her kitten!"

"I suppose he teased it, too?"

"Yes, any animal." Sybil rose. "We *must* get to the top of this hill! I wish I'd brought a stick with me." She turned a radiant face to Janet. "I'll buy one at Muss—what extravagance! I simply can't realise I have money. We'll drive in to-morrow, and wire our address to Worthing. Come on, my dear, and over the top!"

They returned, hot and tired, glad of a little rest before their trip on the water. Since the landlady's niece had chartered the boat Janet was not surprised to find the young fisherman of the scene on the beach. Shy and cautious at first, he let them draw him out on the island's recent history. An American lady had bought it after the war as a refuge for her English husband, terribly disfigured, so they said. The fisherman had never seen him,

except from afar in a boat, but Mr. Abel, who had been his batman, had once mentioned in the bar that the Major's face was "half shot away." Mrs. Fortescue had done wonders to Rual Castle, putting in the electric light and pulling down the ruined part in the rear, using the stones for a wall that ran round the kitchen garden. The Major could eat, and had one sound eye, but he shrank from observation, still young, a handsome man in the past.

"How terrible," Mrs. Mappin murmured. "We mustn't go too near."

To their surprise the fisherman said:

"He's deid the noo, and his leddy awa', to her hame over the sea. A guid wife she's been, and cud'na thole the Castle wi'out him."

"But we saw a light there last night?" Janet prompted.

"Oo-ay, the auld Abels, or mebbe, Jim."

As if the name had loosened his tongue he went on to explain that the property was for sale, the housekeeper and her husband staying on as caretakers, with the pair at the farm. Yes, there was a farm on the other side of the island, with pasturage for two cows. How else could they get their milk and butter? There was plenty of poultry, too, and some pigs. They used to take sheep over there and leave them for the summer, but Major Fortescue stopped this, and there'd been a bit of trouble, as it was the custom hereabouts. What did he do with himself? He'd be in and out of the swimming pool, which she'd built, play tennis and shoot the rabbits in the warren. Then, they'd go for long trips in the launch, and land for a tramp on the hills, where they wouldn't meet more than a lone shepherd. He was happy enough, Mr. Abel said, in his wife's company. But last winter he took to his bed with the influenza that went to his chest, and nothing could save him. There'd been deaths in the village, too, for it seemed to get a hold on people. His own Grannie had died of it. Started at Muss, it did.

Janet, meeting his blue eyes, nodded. She knew the effect of an epidemic in pure air where no resistance could be built up. But now they were approaching the island, her whole attention given to the grim old keep, once four-square, with a tower remaining on either side that seemed to be part of the rocky bluff.

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"There can't be much light," Mrs. Mappin pointed out. "Only loopholes on the ground floor. Wouldn't you like to go over it?"

"I should," said Janet. "But can we, without an order?"

The fisherman's face had brightened, and he said cautiously that he knew the Abels and it might be arranged. He drew the boat up to the jetty, and helped the pair out. They walked round, past a narrow door in the tower, to the main one, in massive oak bleached grey and studded with nails. Here their guide pulled the bell, and they waited, hearing it clang. Presently a middle-aged woman appeared, in a neat black dress, but only one stocking, the reason plain, for a bandage showed above a felt slipper. She hesitated at Sybil's request.

"I'm not supposed to, madam, without the agent knows."

"I could give you my card," Mrs. Mappin urged, and hunted for one in her bag. "Here it is! We're staying at the inn across the loch for a few days, and the boatman knows us."

"Ay," said the youth solemnly.

Mrs. Abel, who had been studying the visitors, yielded a point.

"I could show you the principal rooms, if you'll come inside, madam, but not the grounds, as I scalded my foot yesterday." Her back to a flight of stone stairs she smiled at the fisherman. "I'll send Jim down to you." And, closing the door, began, "These are only the cellars that some say were dungeons, cut into the rock and very good for keeping things. I'll go first, if you'll excuse me."

Intrigued, they followed, in the light that streamed down from above, and reached a flagged hall with mounted stags' heads on the walls. To their surprise they saw through a pair of glass doors a garden on a slightly lower level, and a well-kept tennis lawn. Mrs. Abel followed their gaze with twinkling eyes.

"You didn't expect that, did you, madam?" she asked Mrs. Mappin. "It's often puzzled me to know if this is the ground floor or the first. The Castle is built against what they call the 'bluff,' which goes round most of the island, except in the dip by the swimming pool." She had a pleasant voice, with a trace of a Cockney accent. Opening a door on the garden side, she ran on, "This was

the old banqueting hall that Mrs. Fortescue turned into a music-room, and they generally sat here."

"But it's furnished!" Janet exclaimed, looking round the vast space.

"Yes, miss." Unerringly, the housekeeper had guessed which was the unmarried woman. "Madame took away a few things she treasured, and the rest are to be sold. She has plenty in her Washington home. That's a good piano, I'm told—they were fond of music—and this cabinet holds a wireless set."

Sybil had been gazing at a silver screen over the low platform where the instrument stood.

"Is that for *Ciné* films?"

"It is, madam, with the latest reels. The poor Major used to work it on Saturday evenings, and we'd come in, Mr. and Mrs. Lowry from the farm, and the others. He was used to them, you see. I suppose you know how it was with him?"

"Yes. So sad," Sybil responded. "Still, he seems to have had a beautiful home and all he wanted."

"Mrs. Fortescue saw to that; they were wrapped up in each other, and so kind to us, didn't want us to be dull. Not that my husband was, always about the Major, and misses him terribly. They were wounded in the same action and has been together ever since. When they settled here I came from London and joined them, bringing my son. He's the electrician, looks after the power-house and the launch."

"You won't be sorry to get back to town?" Mrs. Mappin suggested, as they returned to the hall.

"No, madam. It will be a treat to see the shops again, those in Muss very poor. But we promised Mrs. Fortescue to stay until the island was sold, as she wanted to get home." She threw open an opposite door. "The morning-room, where they took their meals. A pretty chintz, isn't it?" When they agreed she recrossed the hall. "This is the library."

It, too, was attractive, with a handsome writing desk that ran across the window. In the deep fireplace logs were piled, facing an oak settle, between the walls lined with books, some of them bound in calf.

"Fancy leaving all these behind," Janet murmured to Sybil, examining the nearest shelf. "I couldn't do that."

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"Madam had enough to pack." Mrs. Abel, who had sharp ears, sounded tart. "Being a rich lady, she could buy others. And once you've read a book you don't want it again. They'd play bridge here on a winter evening with Mr. Abel and my son—I'm not very good at the game." She ushered them out. "You must be careful now, as it's two steps down." Opening a vaulted door that led into a smaller hall, she explained, "This is where the family slept, preferring it to the floor above. That was only used by the maids." With an air of pride she turned a ring handle and advanced. "Isn't this a beautiful room? In the old days it was for visitors to the Castle, all put in together! Men, I suppose," she added primly. "A strange idea?"

"Yes," Sybil conceded, picturing the wild clansmen staggering in after a huge meal to drop on the floor, wrapped in their plaids. Her eyes lingered on the twin beds, lost on the Chinese carpet, the couches and comfortable arm-chairs, in blue brocade that matched the curtains. "It's charming! One could live in it."

"Mrs. Fortescue liked it to rest in, and would have her breakfast here. When we came it was hung with tapestry, all full of holes and moths!" Mrs. Abel smiled. "We soon got rid of that, and polished the panels behind. Though it was a task! I don't believe they had been touched for years. Then the walls above were painted that sunny yellow. Madam was all for light and warmth. I daresay you've noticed the central heating?"

"Yes. But how do you get the coke?" Mrs. Mappin asked practically.

"From Muss in our barge, madam. It's brought straight to the cellar by the door on to the jetty, and comes up in the lift that Madam put in, like the bathroom next door." She led the way to it. "With a shower, and even hot rails for the towels." She waited for the pair to admire the blue bath with its chromium fittings, and moved forward again. "The Major's dressing-room, a funny shape, as it's in the tower. Octagonal."

Repressing a smile, Mrs. Mappin surveyed the panelled walls.

"It's quaint, isn't it, Janet? Though rather grim. It might have been a guard-room."

"The Major liked it," said Mrs. Abel, with dignity. She

unlatched an outer door, to reveal a path, sheltered from the sea by a row of conifers. "He could slip down this way to bathe. You ought to see the swimming pool, but I'm afraid to venture with my foot."

"Yes, you must rest it as much as you can," Janet told her. "Is it painful?"

"Not as bad as it was, thank you, miss. The chemist at Muss sent me some fine stuff for it." She glanced at Mrs. Mappin, speculation in her eyes. "You like what you've seen of the Castle, madam?"

"I do, indeed. Mrs. Fortescue must have wonderful taste. Have you any idea what she is asking for it?"

"I couldn't say exactly, madam." Mrs. Abel was smiling now, like an angler with a nibble. "But I know it's very reasonable. She'll never come back, and what good is it to her in America? Wouldn't you care to go round the island? If my husband were here he'd show you, but he's taken one of the cows in the barge to a farm on the headland, where there's a bull. You can't lose your way alone."

Janet was thinking it was rather hard to raise false hopes, but she, too, wanted to explore.

"What about our fisherman?" she asked. "He'll imagine we're lost!"

"He's probably off with my Jim to the lobster-pots," Mrs. Abel said slyly. "He won't overcharge you, madam, and perhaps you'd like a couple to take back with you? We've plenty to spare, and my husband prefers a crab. Cooked in my own way, picked out and mixed, with a little white sauce, then brown crumbs on the top, baked, and served hot."

"It sounds delicious," said Sybil. "But we're keeping you standing. Straight down this path?"

"That's right, madam, and you'll come to the swimming pool. Then follow the burn and turn off to the higher ground. You could return by the other cliff, which will bring you to our quarters. I'll have the kettle on, as you might like a cup of tea."

"That would be very nice."

The pair set off, with trees bordering the lawn, then a wall, on their left, down the sloping path, delighted with the unexpected adventure.

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The journey home was slower, against the tide, Mrs. Mappin unusually silent, and Janet glad to rest, for the island had proved much larger than they had imagined. She kept an eye on the boards, under which two very live lobsters reposed, afraid that they might emerge and pinch her legs! On reaching the beach she was relieved when Sybil asked the young fisherman to take them across to the landlady, and tell her they wouldn't want tea.

"Throwing your money about," Janet chaffed her, as he went off, overpaid.

"The poor lad's had no sleep, out all night fishing! Let's sit down against that boat."

It was drawn up above the line of the tide, and from here they could watch the sunset. Janet idly scooped up a handful of pebbles.

"That looks like a moss agate," Sybil pointed out. "I wonder if they find amber here. Hasn't it been a lovely afternoon?"

"Simply perfect," Janet said drowsily. "I can't get that cottage out of my mind, with the view of the coast, and the open sea."

They had come across it high on the cliff at the farthest point of the island, had tapped and, getting no answer, boldly lifted the latch. Within was a roomy kitchen, with an empty range, a tea-set in willow pattern on the shelves. A film of dust lay on the chairs and the table drawn up to the window. Outside, an awning, rolled askew, flapped over a paved space, with rails guarding the sheer descent. Poised between sky and sea they knew a sense of peace and freedom that brought from Janet's lips:

"What a place to write in!"

"So you could, on that kitchen table." Sybil moved nearer. "With everything you want. Look at that brass inkpot, made out of the cap of a shell. I expect Major Fortescue did his correspondence here."

"And then she'd join him and have a picnic tea. There's a kettle on the hob. What's in here?" Janet opened the inner door. "A scullery, with a sink, and firewood piled in the corner. Stairs!" She was gone. Presently, she called down: "Two empty rooms, full of dust and spiders! So it isn't occupied." Rejoining Sybil, she gazed at the endless vista. "It must be magical in the moonlight."



"Or in a storm," Sybil suggested. "Sit down for a minute and rest."

Now, on the beach, she seemed lost in another spell of thought, watching a bent old woman, a shawl drawn over her head, collecting driftwood, to pile it in her black apron. Janet gave Sybil the opening she needed, although she spoke in fun:

"If they'd sell that cottage separately, I'd be tempted to buy it!"

"You needn't do that. I'm thinking of buying the island."

"Not really?" Amazed, the other saw that she meant it. "But it's much too large a place for you and Marigold."

"Wouldn't she love it, though? Such a healthy life for a child."

"She won't be a child for ever." Janet thought it a wild idea. "How are you going to educate her?"

"By finding a good governess. I don't believe in schools, where girls learn a lot of nonsense. From each other, I mean; nonsense about love, the result later on silly flirtations. If it has to be, I'd like Marigold to come fresh to marriage, with a well-trained mind, and perfect health. Though not too early."

"The healthier she is, the more likely to want a husband when young. She's a warm-hearted little soul, and she has a will of her own."

"Like her mother," Sybil interposed, smiling. "Go on with your objections."

"Then I think it's a great mistake to cut her off from other children. And what about yourself? With only the servants and pair at the farm! You'd be bored stiff without any intellectual society."

"But that's not my idea at all," Sybil said impatiently. "It came to me suddenly in that cottage. There must be many women like us, who have suffered from man's injustice. I could offer them a sanctuary. I've the means, and I'd like to do something useful with my money. But I should need help." A softer note came into her voice. "A big responsibility, and I'm hoping that you will share it, be my right hand. Will you, my dear?"

Janet was slow in responding.

"I'm not going to live on you," she said at length. "It sounds ungrateful, but I can't risk my self-respect." With

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a wry smile she added: "All that's been left me! No, Sybil dear, it wouldn't do."

"Not even if I should ask for more than I could offer? The help I couldn't get anywhere else, for, whatever the Medical Council has done, they can't take away your knowledge. You're the best doctor I've ever met, and I want you to look after our health—no, don't interrupt!" Sybil checked her. "I know you aren't allowed to practise, but surely, in any accident you could give first aid? Or advise me in sickness, if——"

"I can't even sign a prescription!" Janet interrupted bitterly.

"That doesn't matter. We could have a well-stocked medicine cupboard. I should feel safe with you there. Supposing anything happened to Marigold in a storm, and we couldn't get a doctor from Muss? I should never forgive myself!" Sybil went on, more quietly, "Apart from this, I must have someone I can trust to take command when I go south for interviews, to get in supplies, and so forth."

"Are you going to pay for everything?" Janet asked.

"Yes, but they'll have to work, without remuneration." Conscious of a mistake, she coloured. "Of course, in your case——"

"Don't be absurd," said Janet hotly. "I wouldn't take it! And you mayn't be able to get the place."

"I feel certain I shall. It won't be easily sold, and I must make a home for Marigold somewhere. This is an ideal spot, far from my old life, and Luther's friends." Sybil laid a hand over Janet's, tightly clasped above the pebbles. "You needn't make up your mind at once, but let's discuss ways and means. There are plenty of difficulties, the main one the farm. Mrs. Abel told me that the Lowrys were leaving, to go to a widowed daughter and help to run hers. Just as well, as I won't have a man on the place." She saw the other's surprise. "It would spoil it all, the chance of showing that women can do anything if they set their minds to it. I suppose I could get a widow, accustomed to the work, who might be glad of a home. Or perhaps, two land girls, who want to live together? They're very capable, some of them, and most have been turned away."

"I think I could help you there," Janet said thoughtfully.

"An old patient of mine, who'd give anything to escape from her present life. Do you know a farm near the woods beyond Belling Down belonging to some people called Gee?"

"I can't place it, but I seem to remember the name. Is her husband dead?"

"No, but a perfect brute! Has a violent temper, and fits of drinking, when he beats his wife and daughter. Mrs. Gee broke down once and told me she'd have run away long ago if it hadn't been for the child." Janet scowled. "He's unfaithful, too."

"Then why doesn't she divorce him?"

"Because of the 'shame'!" Janet shrugged her shoulders. "The old story! That class doesn't take kindly to divorce. Also, I doubt if she'd get sufficient alimony. Farmers depend so much on the season, and they're most of them in low water, let down by the Government. Empty promises!" she scoffed. "But don't start me on that! The only trouble is if Mrs. Gee came she'd have to bring Polly, and you mightn't care for the girl."

"Why not? She could help in the dairy. What age is she?"

"Fifteen." Janet was frowning. "And not over-bright, a case of arrested development. At school she was the butt of the other children, but she might improve away from her father, of whom she is terrified; runs into the woods when he's drinking and hides, until her mother puts a lighted candle in the window. I spoke to him when he broke his wife's arm, but it wasn't any good, although I said she could have him up for assault, and that I would support her. She's such a nice woman, takes the whole farm on her shoulders when he's incapable, would think nothing of two cows."

"Then I'll have her," said Sybil impulsively, and was seized by a doubt: "That girl wouldn't do Marigold any harm?"

"No. There's nothing vicious about Polly. She's docile, and obeys her mother, is really a great help to her. Besides, I could probably——" Janet checked herself at Sybil's eager glance. "I'd like a night to think it over."

"You shall have it, my dear." Sybil checked a sigh, wishing her friend were not so proud. "Though I'd like

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to know before I go to Muss and make a bid for my nunnery!"

Janet laughed.

"I can't see you as a Mother Superior, in those voluminous skirts!"

"A tweed one and a jumper will be our 'habit.' We could knit in the winter evenings. I don't see that we need be dull," Sybil went on thoughtfully. "With plenty of books and the wireless,"—she smiled—"to say nothing of the 'Pictures.' Food shouldn't be difficult, with milk, pigs and poultry. I could shoot the rabbits, for they must be kept down—I shot as a girl with my father—and learn to drive the launch. Young Abel can teach me. That's a point to remember, Janet. They must stay until we're settled in, and so must the Lowrys, but they're all so keen to see the place sold that I think they would."

"Yes," Janet agreed. "But when they leave what will you do about maids? It's a lonely place."

"I shan't have them! Everyone must work, or we shouldn't be happy; keep our own bedrooms and share in the rest. Just as they do in a convent. If Cook came I could make an exception, as naturally, she would expect wages, and she could give us cooking lessons, a good training for Marigold. Pay the governess, too, I suppose."

"And who does the washing-up?" Janet asked, with a smile.

"Didn't you see the machine for it? The kitchen quarters roused my envy, everything to save labour. Americans are really wonderful! There'll be gardening, too, but I'll probably find some girl trained to be a head one during the war—now on the dole! There were a lot of heart-breaks when the men came home, girls ordered by the Labour Exchange to take jobs they hated." A new thought intervened. "Don't imagine you won't have time for your writing. Unless it's vitally important I promise not to disturb you; at any rate, in the mornings. You shall have the cottage, sleep there if you like, and no one shall go near you."

"That's a strong inducement," Janet told her.

The picture rose of her dingy London lodgings, with the blackened houses opposite, and the evenings alone, regretting the past. She was half-persuaded, yet some-

thing held her back. Sybil broke the short silence that followed.

"What would your friend, Michael Chaytor, think of it?"

With a start, Janet came back to the present.

"He'd approve, as he still worries absurdly. It wasn't his fault any more than mine." She leaned forward to pick up the shell of a sea urchin and admire the delicate convolutions. "I'll tell you something, though you'll probably laugh. Last Sunday we went to the Zoo, and he asked me to marry him. In the lion house, of all places!"

"Better than the monkey house," Sybil said, irresistibly.

"Much! But you see what a good chap he is? So relieved to be free from marital ties, and then he proposes to saddle himself with another! The only decent way he could offer to support me."

"What did you say?" Sybil asked curiously, with an under-current of fear.

"That to share his name would be an honour, but I couldn't give up my freedom. At this moment a lion yawned at us, the quintessence of boredom, and we laughed!"

"How funny!" Sybil was watching Janet's amused face. "Are you sure he isn't fond of you?"

"He didn't even pretend to be. He said we had so much in common that he was sure we'd hit it off, and finally, that if ever I changed my mind I was to let him know. Then he dropped the subject and asked me to go with him to the First Night of a friend's play. I couldn't, as I was off with you. He thought this holiday an excellent notion." Janet grinned. "Which didn't sound as if he'd miss me much! I was longing to say something about 'making an honest woman of me,' but I thought it wiser not. It hadn't occurred to him that marriage would confirm the public opinion! He's curiously naïve in some ways, and without conceit, a rare trait in a well-known writer."

"Yes, refreshing," Sybil agreed, her mind at rest.

A little shiver ran over her, and Janet exclaimed:

"You're cold!" The sun had dipped below the horizon, and a wind stole across the sea, the treacherous breath of spring. "Let's go in?" Rising with a supple move-

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ment she held out her hands to help Sybil up. Face to face, looking into the soft brown eyes, her resolution wavered. The dear thing, why keep her in suspense? "I'm coming with you to Muss to-morrow," she announced in a casual voice. "I've decided to enter your nunnery!"

Sybil's hands tightened on hers, and she murmured, "Thank God!"

Stumbling over the shingle, a queer idea came to Janet: not a convent based on the love of God, but to nourish a hatred of man. She wondered how long it would last. Anyhow, it would be an adventure, and she could go on acquiring "copy," though hardly to include romance. Little did she guess what was waiting for her within the grim walls of Rual Castle, and the beauty of the island.



## THE COMMUNITY

MRS. SYBIL MAPPIN . . .	the founder, a widow.
MARIGOLD MAPPIN . . .	her daughter.
"THE DEACONESS" . . .	Mrs. Mappin's "Cousin Selina."
DR. JANET VICKERS . . .	erased from the Medical Register, becoming a novelist.
ANNA SEVERN . . .	a barrister, becoming a painter.
MISS FLOWDEN . . .	Marigold's governess.
MRS. GEE . . .	the farmer.
POLLY GEE . . .	her daughter.
MRS. AMY CARTWRIGHT . . .	a dismissed County Council schoolteacher.
MADAME SOLANGE DUCROY . . .	a divorcée from Lyons.
RACHEL PEDLAR . . .	a dressmaker.
RUTH PEDLAR . . .	her sister, a hunchback.
CLARA PARR . . .	a trained nurse, the victim of bigamy.
IRENE MILLER ("I-REEN") . . .	the gardener.
"CHARLIE," (CHARLOTTE) . . .	the electrician.
MRS. BROWN . . .	the housekeeper.





## PART ONE—1939

### CHAPTER I

MARIGOLD awoke in the tower room. The clock had stopped, but through the open door she could see bright sunshine. She drew herself up in bed, stretching luxuriously. A sudden crack and a fallen shoulder-strap brought from her an impatient "Bother!" At sixteen mending can be a trial, and despite Sybil's efforts Marigold was not a good needlewoman. Another heavenly day! Go down and swim while the water was cool? She thrust her legs out of bed, and a red-gold plait swung over her shoulder. Her hair, parted in the middle, with escaping tendrils framing her candid brow, should have been her pride, but Marigold coveted Janet's close-cropped curls. The plaits were tied at the end with tape, and her night-dress was of the plainest description, like the rest of her clothes. This was the fashion on the island, and did not trouble her, so long as she was free to run and climb, and leap for a high ball at tennis. But when she reached the dressing-table she pulled out a drawer to gloat over its contents, hair-ribbons laid out like a man's ties, in every colour. Some shabby, but all dearly loved. A new one lay on the top, and she lifted it to admire the black, red and yellow stripes. Miss Plowden, her governess, had discovered it among her treasures, the gift of an earlier pupil. Carefully, with her nail-scissors, Marigold cut it in two, and her golden-brown eyes sparkled under their full white lids, which Anna Severn yearned to paint. They gave the girl's childish face a mysterious air of languor, although she was never still. She must show her new trophy to Polly, Mrs. Gee's daughter at the farm. Poor Polly! Marigold was frowning now, as the scene last night rose in her mind, that terrible punishment for breaking the Rule. No man was allowed on the island. Yet, unable to sleep, the Deaconess had gone to her window and seen in the moonlight a boat drawn up to

the jetty, and Polly in a fisherman's arms. Never had there been such a scandal, with the Gees banished to their farm, the community sitting in judgment. At the thought even Marigold's generous mouth tightened. In the arms of a *man*? Disgusting! After supper mother had got out the bundle of canes. Armed with these, the others had lined up, their backs to the refectory table, and Polly had run the gauntlet. Mercifully, Marigold had not seen from where she stood at the head of the rank her parent's cruel cut at the girl's bare shoulders, nor the spots of blood that stained her chemise, but she had heard Polly scream before she dashed into the hall. Mrs. Gee had run after her daughter, to thrust Janet aside with a harsh, "I'll see to her!" The door had closed on hysterical sobs, and Mrs. Gee's voice: "They shouldn't ha' done it!"

That horrid old Deaconess, Marigold thought, as she brushed and replaited her hair, then tied it with the new ribbons. She always made trouble—and she had enjoyed it! The girl could not guess that Polly's youth and freshness had been a spur to the middle-aged woman, whom love had passed by. She had upheld Mrs. Mappin in the teeth of Janet's advice: an example must be made.

Marigold slipped her feet into canvas shoes—she had never worn stockings—and strode along the path. When she came to a door in the wall of the kitchen garden she had a happy thought. Polly loved strawberries, and there were none at the farm. In Marigold went, snapping off a cabbage leaf still wet with dew, and lifting the net filled it with the ripe fruit. The Gees were excused the communal breakfast, on account of their early work; Janet too, at her cottage, thankful to escape the double walk and onus of conversation before she started to write. Marigold loved her whole-heartedly, appreciating her sense of justice, as a child instinctively will, and sometimes, perplexed by the absence of this in her mother. Long years of absolute power had not improved Sybil's character. Three of the islanders had left for this reason, preferring poverty and the search for work to the sway of a tyrant, despite her charm and generosity. Others had filled their places, holding her views concerning men, which of late had become an obsession. Marigold, who had never spoken

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to one since nursery days, accepted this as natural. Man was the enemy.

When she reached the swimming pool, and the crescent of trees beyond known as "the wood", she took a short cut through it and came to the warren, where rabbits watched her approach, and the timorous made for their burrows. A small bunny in its haste turned head over heels, and Marigold's laugh rang out. Now, as she climbed, she could see the roof of the farm in a hollow ahead, and the nearest field with the pair of cows munching the grass. The other meadow, set aside for hay, was full of quaking-grass and yellow ox-eyed daisies, with the smaller plants that she loved; ladies' fingers, creeping vetches and, earlier in the year, kingcups and forget-me-nots fringing the burn. This, from one of the three springs in the island, filled the pond where the cattle drank, and ran down the hill to boggy ground, with rushes and bright patches of moss. On the level Marigold quickened her pace, and opened the farmyard gate. Mrs. Gee, at the dairy door, was stacking the milk bottles in what Polly called the "pram." She looked up, with no welcome on her comely face, when Marigold greeted her and extended the cabbage leaf.

"I brought these for Polly. How is she?"

"As might be expected," Mrs. Gee snapped. "I'm keeping her in bed, so I've no time to chatter. I must get this up to the Castle."

"I'll do it," said Marigold eagerly. "Aunt Janet first, I suppose?"

"Yes, these two bottles in front. I spared her a drop of cream." Looking into the girl's fresh face, the farmer relented. "Thank you, my dear. For the strawberries, too. You might ask Dr. Janet if she'd look in as she goes to dinner and see Polly's back. I'm afraid I was a bit short with her last night, but I was fair upset."

"She'd understand." Impulsively, Marigold put an arm round the stout body. "I'm so sorry," she whispered, and kissed Mrs. Gee. "Give Polly my love."

"That I will. Although she's been a naughty girl. Would you like a glass of milk?" She fetched it and watched Marigold drink thirstily, like a child with a mug. "Now take care over that rough path, and don't leave the milk to stand in the sun."

Off went Marigold, pushing the hand-cart. There was heather on the heights, and beyond it the sea, with the fitful breeze that hung about the cliff, and the flash of gulls' wings. Janet's little garden was purely utilitarian, except for a honeysuckle over the porch, and fuchsia bushes guarding the entrance. Marigold knocked, and lifted the latch as the owner called, "Come in!"

She was in the scullery boiling an egg on an oil stove, for the range in summer made the kitchen too hot, and was only used for her Saturday night's tub.

"The milk? Good!" she greeted the girl. "I was longing for my tea."

"And cream." Marigold put the two bottles in the sink, hearing the last gurgle of cold water escape from the bath beyond it. "A peace-offering, I fancy!" She delivered Mrs. Gee's message. "I hope Polly's back isn't very bad? I hardly touched it, but I'd like to give the Deaconess a swipe! Did you see her? I shan't go to her service to-morrow, though she begged me to assist!" Marigold smiled mischievously. "I only did it once out of politeness because she's mother's cousin. That egg will be hard as a rock!"

"I like them hard." Janet fished it out of the saucepan with a spoon and put the kettle back. "Will you stay and have a cup of tea with me?"

"No, thanks, darling. Mrs. Gee gave me some milk." Marigold paused, a little frown above her tawny eyes. "Aunt Janet, couldn't you have stopped that business last night?"

"I tried to. But your mother is a disciplinarian. Is she up yet?"

"I don't think so. She hadn't used the bath. Have you seen my new ribbons?"

"Yes." Janet smiled. "I Zingari colours. Do you know what they mean? Out of darkness, through fire, into light."

"That's queer." Marigold was thinking it over. "Birth, life—and then? What the Deaconess calls the 'Here-after.' Though she doesn't know much about it! I asked her. When I choose my religion I shall get hold of someone who does." She examined the safety-pin behind the bow, and threw the plait over her shoulder. "The Deaconess is always at me for not being confined."

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Janet stared at her, then smiled.

"Confirmed, you mean?"

"That's it! The other's having a baby."

She accepted this process with the calm of a country child, who runs in and out of a farm, and takes an interest in a new calf or litter of pigs. Sybil did not believe that innocence meant ignorance, and had left her in Mrs. Gee's capable hands. She could be trusted to satisfy a natural curiosity without implanting a feeling of shame. It was all arranged, the way animals and human beings came forth, like the flowers and fruit. Janet had helped by giving the girl first lessons in anatomy, pleased by her intelligence, and amused at the way she would turn over a diagram of the veins in a man's body and say, "Isn't he ugly? Women are much prettier." Her mind was as healthy as the wind that blew off the sea. Now she glanced at the grandfather clock, ticking away in the kitchen.

"I must go! Or I'll miss my swim. See you at dinner, Aunt Janet!" At midday on the island.

"Right. But, look here, sweetheart, I shouldn't talk about Polly too much. She's been punished, and the sooner it's forgotten the better."

"Yes, that's only fair."

The bare legs twinkled through the outer door. To Janet's ears came the sound of the girl's clear whistling, and the rattling wheels of the milk-cart. If only one could take life like that! Janet, troubled, sat down to her breakfast. This affair with Polly was the worst thing that could have happened, reviving the old hatred of men, which Janet had diagnosed long ago as the result of repression. What was more serious, in Sybil's case it might threaten her balance. She was going through the crisis of middle age, stubbornly resisting its symptoms, refusing to "give way" and take advice in the matter of rest and diet, suffering from high blood pressure, headaches, and sudden fits of temper. Not one patient but two would be on Janet's hands this morning. She could smile now at the title, "Dr. Janet," by which she was known in the island, bestowed on her first by Mrs. Gee, her staunch supporter, scornful of the Medical Council. Sybil had welcomed it as defying the judgment of men, and the others had followed suit. What did it matter?

The bitterness of her broken career was almost forgotten in the success of Janet's next venture. She would never be a great writer, but her books gave pleasure, and after the first two her public had increased with each. She was earning a steady income, able on her rare visits to town to bring Sybil back a handsome present, and to set aside for her own old age. This largely owing to Michael Chaytor. He had persuaded his publishers to persevere with a third volume and, unknown to Janet, had paid the cost. Based on her intimate knowledge of hospital life, it had caught the public's fancy and run into three editions, then cheaper ones, which were still in demand. Once launched, she had never looked back, and life became a joy in the freedom of the island, with the balm to her pride of being necessary to Sybil. She would need Janet now, and swallowing the last mouthful of tea she set forth, choosing the rough path across the heather.

It brought her out near the swimming pool and she could hear voices, one distinct as she slipped past:

"Never cared for her, dumb as an ox, but it wasn't fair play."

That was "Charlie," the electrician, whose real name was Charlotte; a handsome girl on one side of her face, but full well she knew the effect on a man of the other, stained by a dark birthmark that ran down into her neck. Marriage was not for her, although she would have made a good wife and mother. Men went for looks. This was not the only source of bitterness, disguised under her "I'm a lad" attitude, her invariable slacks, and even a pipe stuck in the corner of her cynical mouth. During the war she had worked her way up to a forewoman's post in an engineering "shop," where no facial blemish could impair her efficiency. Peace had brought dismissal, and little chance of continuing the work she loved. Charlie had known the insult, to her, of the dole, and the openly expressed opinion of the Labour Exchange that no one would want her "in domestic service." At last she had found a badly-paid job in the packing department of a large London Stores, where she lived underground, in the company of ex-soldiers, too disfigured to venture out in the daylight, as sick of life as herself. She had endured the hell of this aftermath of war until one frustrated man had attacked her in the dark on her way home to her

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miserable lodgings. Her virtue intact, but with a confirmed hatred of men, she had thrown up the work. It was then, in a public library, that she had seen Mrs. Mappin's advertisement for a woman electrician, had met her in town and, although it seemed a gamble, had jumped at the proposition. No good looking ahead; take what the gods offered! Jim had found her an apt pupil, with her knowledge of machinery, and loving the sea the launch had become her child. She would steer it unafraid in rough weather, and could be trusted to guard it in the little harbour at Muss when Sybil or Janet shopped there. She had no desire to accompany them and meet men's hastily averted eyes, farther than a paper shop where tobacco was sold and satisfied her two needs, for Charlie was a football-pool fan; then back to the cabin, to ignore the news and stake on a fortune. The only gentle side of her nature lay in her love for Marigold, whom she had watched pass from childhood to adolescence. Ready for any prank, they were boon companions, Janet satisfied that the electrician could do the girl no harm. The friendship was good for both, with its softening influence on Charlie, and a quasi-masculine one on the other, to offset the tendency to hysteria when a quarrel broke out among the segregated women. Repression again, which as she grew older Janet decided lay at the root of most human unhappiness. Sex could be sublimated in religious fervour, or a thirst for knowledge requiring intense concentration, but even then, where vitality was strong Nature sometimes took her revenge. Janet knew she had been saved from this in the past by her busy life as a doctor. On the island she moved in two worlds, unconsciously sharing the love-life of her characters. Yet there were times when she missed the stimulus of a man's society, and regretted a foresworn experience. Therefore, she could not condemn Polly, and agreed with Charlie's outspoken comment.

When she reached the open door of Marigold's room she saw the torn nightdress on the floor, picked it up and folded it, with a half-smile. Tidiness was not the girl's forte, and Sybil of late had become so severe that punishment would follow, to be met by Marigold's impatience and a widening of the gulf between them. She would be seventeen next month and had begun to reason for herself. What a mad idea it was, Janet thought, that fair



as a lily she would settle down to inherit the island and community as a sacred trust, satisfied with a world of women. Already, she wanted to travel, and would rebel when the launch went to Muss without her, another of Sybil's edicts. It was mediæval, Janet thought, as passing through the inner hall she tapped at her friend's door.

Sybil, in a cotton wrapper, was seated at the dressing-table, one hand pressed to her forehead.

"Headache, again?" Janet enquired.

"That stupid thumping! It came on after my bath." Sybil smiled wanly. "Cutting my toe-nails, I think! I wish I weren't so fat."

"Better than being thin at your age. But it wouldn't hurt you to diet a little." Janet was studying the tiny veins in her patient's cheeks, exposed by the clear light, and the slightly injected, though still beautiful, eyes. "You ought to go back to bed."

"I can't." Mrs. Mappin's chin was obstinately set. "I must stop all this talk!"

"Why? Much wiser to let them talk it out, and get sick of the subject, without you. Have a good rest and appear at supper. We could have the *Ciné* afterwards and those new reels." She saw it was hopeless, and shrugged her shoulders. "But you never take my advice! I don't know what I'm here for."

"Don't be cross with me." A spasm of pain drew Sybil's brows together, and she yielded. "All right! To please you." Ponderously, she rose. "I've left my nightdress in the bathroom."

"I'll find it!"

Sybil watched Janet's swift movement, thinking, "She doesn't look a day older than when we came here, eleven years ago. And I feel a hundred!"

She sighed, but submitted to her friend's ministrations.

"Thank you, my dear. Have you seen Marigold this morning? She hasn't been near me."

"She was up very early." Janet raised the pillow higher under the iron-grey head. "She brought me the milk."

"That's Polly's duty. I suppose she's malingering?"

"I shall know at twelve. Mrs. Gee sent me a message, wants me to have a look at her, is still upset. We shall have to go carefully, Sybil. You don't want to lose the Gees, especially with the chance of war."

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"It won't come! Chamberlain will see to that, and Hitler isn't so mad as to attack the French, with their Maginot Line."

"Michael thinks he may, but we won't go into that. What would you like for breakfast?"

"Nothing! I'm only thirsty."

"Then tea and toast," Janet said, a little too promptly.

"You'll be saying next that I had too much beef last night," Sybil challenged.

"So you did! Red meat is bad for you. I wish you'd take more care of yourself."

At the love in the grey eyes under the black lashes that Time had spared, Sybil relented.

"I'll be good!" This started another train of thought. "Has Marigold done her room? I haven't heard the vacuum sweeper."

"She's been busy," Janet evaded. "And was late for her swim."

"Then she must do it before her lessons. I won't have the house-work neglected, and she ought to set an example."

"Did you at sixteen? I'll bet you were a handful!" Moving off, Janet heard Sybil laugh, and turned her head. "You'll want something to read. Shall I send Charlie over for a paper?"

"No, a book will do. We have the wireless news. Charlie must go to the lobster-pots. If there are sufficient we're having lobsters for dinner. By the way, Janet, you must take my place at the head of the table. But I shall see you first, I hope? I want to hear about Polly. Unless I'm upsetting your work?"

"That doesn't matter. I'll come and report," Janet promised.

She kept her word some hours later, relieved to find Sybil looking better, and to bring reassuring news.

"There's nothing wrong with Polly, except a sore back and the sulks! I was afraid the old trouble might stir, due to her father's brutal habits, but she's no duller than usual. What she resents is the Deaconess's account of what happened." Janet took a chair by the bedside. "Personally, I believe she exaggerated. She doesn't like the Gees, not since Mrs. Gee answered her back when she went round ferreting out everyone's history. Anna was in the dairy that day, and heard Mrs. Gee say firmly,

'If you'll pardon me, I don't see it's any business of yours what happened between me and my husband.'" Janet saw Sybil smile, and proceeded, "Then capped it with, 'Especially as you've never been married.'"

"Poor Selina! Still, it served her right. Did you get the true story out of Polly?"

"No, from Mrs. Gee—abusing the Deaconess! It seems that she refused to believe that the mother knew nothing of what had been going on."

"Of course she didn't, or she'd have stopped it," Mrs. Mappin said impatiently. "Good people are so suspicious! But how did it begin?"

"Polly climbed down the cliff beyond the farm. Pretty dangerous? A boat was passing and the fisherman, seeing her on the rocks, drew in to ask if she was stranded. She's pretty, in a full-blown way, too stupid to talk, so listens—always attractive to a man! I fancy they met several times, then Polly got afraid her mother might catch them, and as she daren't go down the cliff at night suggested the jetty. It was easy to slip out when Mrs. Gee was asleep, and to get into the Castle through the kitchen, where she went down by the coal lift to the tower door."

"Disgraceful," Sybil muttered. "She's twenty-six, not a child, and knows the Rule."

"What's a rule compared with human nature?" Janet asked seriously. "As I told you yesterday, feeble-minded people feel the urge to reproduce themselves, as if in denying them brains Nature made the animal side more potent. And they're generally prolific. So much so that in America the Eugenists have started to sterilise them, in the interests of the race. That's why I begged you to be lenient."

"I know." Sybil looked troubled. "If you or I had discovered Polly we might have hushed it up. Anyhow, she's had her lesson, and I only hope the man won't spread it all over the village."

"He's not likely to. They know that landing is forbidden, were used to it in the Fortescues' time. Besides, the minister is our friend, and overlooks our absence from kirk in return for your handsome Christmas and Easter cheques." Janet's face was mischievous. "He explains that we have our own religion, and attend Holy Communion

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at Muss, since the launch can use the harbour. He'd probably dress the fisherman down. The Deaconess was wise there, told him he'd been warned, and the next time he trespassed he'd be summoned. He went off very quickly, she said. Then she marched Polly back to the farm and the trouble began." To be augmented next day, she might have added, by Sybil's storm of temper. Instead, she went on, "You know how devoted Mrs. Gee is to Polly. This morning she said that they'd better leave, go to some place where a girl wasn't thrashed for speaking to a man, and had a good chance of marriage. Rather a *volte face*? She used to pray that Polly might not be put to the test, as you 'couldn't trust one of them!'"

"That class doesn't reason," Sybil said coldly. "They've been perfectly happy up to now."

"I pointed this out, also the fact that if we had war this would probably be the safest place in the British Isles. Mrs. Gee hasn't forgotten the last, and in the end she admitted that Polly's 'health' had improved, by which she meant her wits. I feel sorry for her, poor woman."

"So do I," Sybil responded. "It wasn't her fault. I sometimes regret inviting Selina here, but the whole thing seemed so cruel. After giving up her life to her brother, to be let down like that. A man of sixty, to marry a girl of twenty-five! It's disgusting, and I never saw such a change in a woman. She was a nice-looking girl when she stayed with us at the Hall on the eve of her marriage, her trousseau prepared and everything arranged. She was looking forward to her life in India with Captain Ruthven, a hill station, and plenty of friends. Then Andrew's wife died, and Selina flew to him. You would think a clergyman, who preached Christian fortitude, would pull himself together; instead of this he was quite helpless, so Selina put off the wedding and the regiment sailed without her."

"Couldn't she have gone out later?" Janet asked. "I've rather forgotten the story."

"It was arranged twice, and each time Andrew had a relapse! Naturally, Captain Ruthven got tired of waiting, and the engagement was broken off. He married his Colonel's daughter a year later, and Selina threw herself into church work; ruled the parish"—Sybil's smile pointed

the words—"and finally, became a Deaconess. Then she had her reward. Andrew, a good-looking man and a fine preacher, was made a bishop. A delightful old town, and they settled down at the palace, to be entertained by the County and the Close. You can imagine the shock it was when coming home from a dinner-party he broke the news to her. Moreover, the bride-to-be had stipulated that she must have him to herself!"

"I'm not surprised," said Janet. "She'd like to rule here if you let her."

"I'm aware of that. Still, life seemed over to Selina, although Andrew insisted on making her an allowance, to augment what her parents had left her. Eventually, she found work in the slums, at Stepney, I believe, then her health broke down and the doctors ordered her a long rest in pure air. I think what induced me to have her, here was her changed attitude towards men—and now she's made friends with the Catholic priest at Muss! She has always been a Ritualist, and I shouldn't be surprised if she changed her faith."

"Excellent!" Janet exclaimed. "She'd have to go to Mass each Sunday, Confession, too, and she couldn't do that from here."

"No. I stretched a point in sending them in to Early Service, once a month. By the way, it's the first Sunday to-morrow. I must remind Charlie."

"I'll do that." Janet started, hearing the gong. "There's dinner! I'm sending you in a nice basin of broth, and the milk pudding."

Mrs. Mappin made a wry face.

"No lobster? All right—such an obedient patient? Don't forget to take my chair."

Easier said than done, for when Janet reached the refectory the Deaconess was enthroned.

"Oh, there you are!" Janet said brightly. "Quite right—I'm going to wait." She glanced at Anna Severn, whose duty it was to-day, and saw her amused understanding. "Will you give me a hand, Anna? It will make it quicker."

They proceeded round the table with the helpings of lobster, and Anna finally reached the Deaconess, still resenting Janet's words.

"The hostess last," Anna observed sweetly. "That's right, isn't it? I'm sorry there's only a claw left."

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"It doesn't matter," The Deaconess surveyed it. "I'll trouble you for the salad, Miss Plowden."

Charlie, across the table, winked at Marigold.

"Reminds me of Ascot," she began, in an over-refined voice. "Though there isn't the champagne. Last time I was there, in the Royal Enclosure, an old dame put up her glasses and stared at my dress. Believe it or not, there was a lobster claw, one of the little ones you suck, stuck in the lace! But I didn't lose my head; I planted it in the hydrangeas." Marigold was giggling, and Charlie proceeded, "That was a bad day for me. I backed a winner, half a crown each way, and I never saw the bookie again! So——"

The Deaconess raised a repressive hand.

"One minute, Charlotte. I want to hear how Mrs. Mappin is."

With her long nose, faintly tipped with pink, fine bones and large prominent eyes she was not unlike a racehorse herself, a joke between Marigold and Charlie, who declared that she neighed. They watched her now as Janet responded:

"She's better for the rest, will be with us for supper and to see the new films."

"I hope they've put in the Châteaux on the Loire," Miss Plowden remarked. "I should like to see those again."

"They have," said Charlie. She had run them off, as usual, and reported to Sybil, who rejected anything too amorous. "There's a new Walt Disney, too, and a topping fight."

"Must we have that?" the Deaconess asked, with an air of distaste.

"Oh, come now, be sporting," Charlie urged. "The white champion's British. I thought you were patriotic, Deaconess? Still"—she addressed the company—"hands up!"

There were only two dissentient votes, Amy Arkwright imitating the lady in the high chair.

"It may be a somewhat degrading sport for men," the Deaconess neighed. "But I think any woman who goes to a prize-fight should be ashamed of herself! And the same should apply to films."

"That's a little severe on us," Miss Plowden murmured.

"No worse than a bull-fight, surely? And we had that from the library last time, though distinctly toned down. I once saw a bull-fight in Madrid, and wished I could come out. I've always been fond of horses."

Marigold looked at Charlie and made a spluttering noise.

"Choked," she explained, and drank hastily from the water in her glass. She was not allowed wine or beer, like the others.

"The most horrible thing I ever saw," said Anna, in her clear, trained voice, for she had qualified for the Bar. "Was a church in Rome. I forget the name, but the walls were covered with the martyrdoms of the Saints, people being sawn in half, or crucified upside-down! Luckily, the painting was vile, so that one could dismiss the effect as grotesque." She forestalled the Deaconess's correction by springing up to collect the empty plates. "There's tapioca pudding for the good, and cheesecakes for moral offenders. Which will you have, Deaconess? I think it should be a cheesecake after that claw."

"I'll take a little milk pudding," the Deaconess responded, tight-lipped, and looked down the long table. "I must really pick some fresh flowers. These are dead!"

"My fault," said Anna cheerfully. "I was painting and forgot." She had come to Irene Miller, who insisted on calling herself "I-reen." "The garden looks dried-up. Shall we help you to water it?"

"Better wait for rain. Sprinkling only brings the roots up."

A market-gardener's daughter, she was excellent in growing vegetables and fruit. No one knew her history except Mrs. Mappin, and Irene preserved a stony silence. A breath of relief went up at her ultimatum.

"I'll weed, if you like," said the hunchback, Ruth Pedlar. Perched on a cushion by her elder sister, Rachel, she looked round for praise, to feed the vanity so often found in dwarfs. It failed, and with a touch of malice she added, "After I've been to see Polly."

"You mustn't go there, my dear," Janet told her. "Mrs. Gee wants Polly to rest."

The little creature, who looked like a child, but was thirty, pouted.

"I shouldn't tire her." Turning the too-large head, she

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gazed beseechingly at the Deaconess. "She must be so dull in bed!"

"No more of that, darling," said her sister. "You must obey Dr. Janet."

"Yes," the Deaconess agreed, with a faint smile. "Miss Vickers is so clever."

The name, never used on the island, brought a blank stare from Miss Plowden, who divined the spiteful intention. Everyone had heard it but Marigold, lost in a dream. The lessons this morning had included literature and she was repeating silently, "Tiger, Tiger, burning bright," which had captured her imagination. "Jerusalem," she knew by heart, with its swords and trumpets, but this was a small and precious gem. She looked up vaguely and saw the anger in Charlie's face. What had happened to cause the sudden silence? Forgetting discretion, she broke out:

"An angel passing? We shall have to speak French when Madame Ducroy arrives. Exciting!"

"Who is Madame Ducroy?" the Deaconess demanded. "I've heard nothing about a new guest."

"I expect mother forgot to tell you. She'll be here next Thursday."

"Did you know?" the Deaconess asked Janet, who was changing the plates, her face rather white.

"Yes. She is coming from London, but her home, I believe, is Lyons." She added, hoping to avert further questions, "Her husband was in the silk trade there."

"A widow?"

"No." Janet hesitated, wishing that Sybil were present. It was no good making a mystery of it, and the others wouldn't care. "She divorced her husband. Justifiably, Mrs. Mappin thinks."

"But divorce isn't sanctioned in France!" The Deaconess looked stunned. "Not by the Church."

"Legally, it is," Anna interposed. "I'm glad she's coming; the French are so intelligent. She will raise the tone of our conversation!"

The Deaconess's face was dark. Why had not Sybil consulted her? Miss Plowden put in her oar:

"A very nice woman, from all accounts. Madame Ducroy has gone through a bad time and will appreciate kindness, which I'm sure she will find here." Dismissing



the subject, she addressed Marigold. "What are you doing this afternoon?" Saturday, a half-holiday.

"I've to pick some peas first," the girl replied. "But I'd like some tennis after that." She looked up as a hand removed her plate. "Will you play with me, Aunt Janet? Do?"

"I'll play," said Anna, quickly, for she knew her friend wanted to write. "Not singles, though, it's too strenuous. What about you, Charlie? You haven't to take the launch out?"

"No." Into the green eyes came a gleam of unholy joy. "I'll have to overhaul the engine, knocking a bit. But after tea I'd love a game."

"So would I," said Clara Parr, the name she had reverted to after the man who had "married" her had been convicted of bigamy. "A change from cooking! What do you think of my pastry?"

"Topping!" Charlie was finishing a cheesecake. She gazed through the window. "Clouding in a bit, but the glass is still high."

Marigold thought, "What's up?" Full well she knew something was brewing in Charlie's active brain. The talk became general, turning to the menace of war, until the Deaconess rose and said Grace. No one wished to linger in what had been the Fortescues' music-room and now served for meals, and as a lounge when the table was cleared. Janet went off to Sybil, but met "Mrs." Brown, the courtesy title of the old, unmarried cook, with the former's empty tray.

"She finished the broth, and most of the milk-pudding, doctor, and now she's going to have a sleep." Her wise old eyes studied Janet's face. "She didn't get much last night, but I hope everything will go straight now."

They understood each other perfectly, since the days before Marigold's birth, and Janet nodded.

"It should do. How is your finger?"

"Much better to-day, thank you. I was afraid it was going to fester, but you took it in time. What should we do without you?"

"I might say the same of you!" Janet responded. "I won't disturb Mrs. Mappin, so I'll be getting back to my work."

"A new book?" Mrs. Brown enquired. "I did like the

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last, and was glad it ended happily. That makes such a difference, doesn't it?"

Her publisher's opinion. Janet smiled as she moved away, to follow the Deaconess, armed with a basket and a pair of gauntlet gloves, determined to put Anna to shame. Living here at Sybil's expense and couldn't even look after the flowers! She agreed, however, that her cousin should not be disturbed. In the vegetable garden Janet found Marigold at a row of peas, and admired the girl's slender arms reaching up to high sticks above her. Ruth, seated on a camp stool, was shelling them into a basin, with an air of importance.

"Bravo!" Janet cried, to the hunchback's delight. "Don't forget to pick some mint. Oh, Marigold," she remembered. "Be quiet if you go to the bathroom. Your mother's trying to sleep."

"Righto!" Marigold lowered her voice, leaning towards Janet. "How's Polly?"

"Fine—except her temper! So don't make a martyr of her."

"No. I can't think how she could be so soppy!"

This was Charlie's favourite word, and satisfied, Janet passed on.

"What did she say?" Ruth asked curiously.

"Nothing much. Here you are!" Marigold tipped out a full basket. "I wish your sister would finish my cotton frock. This linen is hot!"

Rachel Pedlar had worked for Sybil in the old days, her habit being to go out to ladies' houses for renovations and simple gowns. She had supported herself and her sister, deformed from the cradle, when both their parents had died. A hardworking life, brightened by the hope of marriage to a commercial traveller, who made the town a halting place on his round. The engagement had dragged on for six years, whilst she pinched and saved, to help furnish a house, and the man squandered what he earned. Fluent with his excuses, he was always going to do better, then had a "stroke of bad luck," when he would borrow small sums from Rachel, who loved him with all her heart. Getting older, though not wiser, she lived for their meetings, whilst the man found it convenient to eat the suppers she prepared, food beyond her slender means, to which he would bring a bottle of stout and treat her to

a glass. In the end she had received a visit from his sister at Greenwich, who having heard of the affair thought Rachel ought to know that he had a wife and two children in London. This blow had fallen a week before Dr. Mappin's funeral, and altering a dress for the widow she had confided in Sybil, shocked by her changed appearance. Rachel had grown suddenly old, with a longing to escape from the town where her story had leaked out, and the neighbours whispered, "She was a fool to trust the man!" Full well she knew it and, the Castle ready, was only too thankful to accept Mrs. Mappin's invitation. Ruth would be safe, and the chance of being useful in mending the linen, and making tweed skirts for the community preserved Rachel's self-respect. She had no patience with Polly, breaking the Rule as blindly as she herself, had stifled her reason in her one and only love affair. Rachel had been the strongest of the Deaconess's adherents when the question of punishment arose, but now the latter's sharp tongue had undone the good work. "Miss Vickers" indeed! If Mrs. Mappin had heard it there would have been a scene!

One person who could not forgive this was Charlie. Anna Severn, returning from the end of the island with her painting materials, saw her in the heather and changed her course. Like Janet she had found consolation for a broken career in a talent inherited from her father, who had supported a wife and five children by teaching at a School of Art. On her clever face was an indefinable mark that Janet had recognised from her work among the poor, that of starvation, and they had become great friends.

"Where are you off to?" she hailed Charlie, hoping she wouldn't disturb the writer in the cottage.

"I've a date with a cormorant!"

"Then don't touch the nest."

"You bet!" Charlie grinned. "I don't like fishy eggs! Remember the day when our dear Imy brought in some gannet's and the chicks popped out?" She extracted a thin gold watch from a trouser pocket and, looking up, surprised the thought in Anna's mind. "Too good for me? But I pinched it. At the Derby!"

"Nonsense!" Anna laughed.

"Strewth, my pretty. I went there with a friend, a

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hospital nurse, decent sort but no looker. She was flush and offered to pay my fare, as she couldn't go alone, so I was on at once. We were hanging about, waiting on the heath for the first race when I saw a gypsy collide with a man in front, and clutch him to regain his balance. The man cursed him, but the gypsy was off like an eel and brushed past us, for there was a cop after him. I heard him whine, 'You can search me, guv'nor!' and then the horses started, and we were swept forward. I never thought of it again until I got home and turned out my coat pockets. There was the watch!"

"He'd palmed it off on you?" Anna looked at her curiously. "What did you do? Take it to the Lost Property Office?"

"The last place where he'd look for it. A mutt to wear a gold watch to the races!" Charlie scowled. "Moreover, I knew him, a clerk at a Labour Exchange where I used to call. Without result! I guessed how he'd earned the money to buy it, probably, at a pawnshop. A woman outside gave me the tip. She said, 'It's no use unless you slip him a ten-shilling note. That's how my brother got a job, and a friend of his, as well. You try it, my dear.' But I hadn't the cash, and I didn't like him particularly, a facetious gentleman who chipped me about this." She put up her hand to her scarred cheek, and saw Anna's eyes darken. "So after thinking it over I decided to keep the gift. Anyhow, useful for popping! I got it out when Mrs. Mappin sent me my fare. What did I want with a sleeper?" Her green eyes narrowed. "Shocked?"

"N-no," said Anna uncertainly. "He must have been a brute! Did he really——"

She could get no further.

"Sure. He said port wine wouldn't help me! So I got it back in my own way. Keeps jolly good time. Ta-ta!"

Charlie was off, with her loping stride, satisfied by Anna's expression.

Not unlike a gypsy herself, Anna thought, although she had sandy hair; must be forty if she had worked in the war, but she didn't look it. The island had restored Charlie's youth and wiry strength. Anna remembered that she had helped Mrs. Gee bring the last calf into the world, and saved Amy Arkwright, out of her depth in the

swimming pool, to be dragged under and nearly drowned. Anna cast the law aside. That man at the Labour Exchange had deserved it.

Meanwhile, Charlie was cautiously circling the farm. Not quite time yet for Mrs. Gee to be at the milking. She reached what was known as the "Pirate's Rock," where the puffins built their nests, and stared up at the mackerel sky. The sea, so smooth this morning, was crinkled. A boat at a little distance caught her attention, and Charlie retreated. "I'll be nabbed next," she muttered. "Damn his eyes!" Turning she made her way back to the farm, the side that faced the water, and threw some gravel at a window above. A second volley, and Polly appeared in her nightgown, to peer down, raise the lower pane and lean out.

"Oh, it's you," she said with a sullen expression.

"Don't talk too loud," Charlie warned her. "But would you like to score off the Deaconess?"

"That I would, the old cat!"

"Then listen. Is your ma going to Early Service to-morrow?"

"I expect so, but I'm not," said Polly. "Not in the launch with *her*! It's *her* that's made all the trouble."

"I know, and we'll give her a spot in return! But you've got to help me, Polly. You mustn't say I've been here." Gazing up at the pretty, stupid face, Charlie curbed her impatience. "Got that?"

"Yes. I'm not to say you've been here," Polly repeated.

"Not to anyone. It's important. Not even yer ma, or you might be punished."

"I bain't supposed to have visitors, so I won't."

"Righto! But there's more. You must stop your ma going to-morrow. Easy to do. Say you've come over queer, and can't be left. Howl, if you like, but she mustn't be on the launch. Understand? I want the Deaconess to myself."

"To beat her?" Polly asked hopefully.

"No. You leave it to me, and don't ever say I was here, or I might get kicked out."

"I shouldn't like that," Polly admitted. "But Rachel is going."

"Anyone else?" Charlie asked.

"Anyone else what?"

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"Going to Muss."

"The Deaconess"—a pause—"and Miss Plowden, I suppose. I'm not sure. Rachel said there might be only the three of them."

"Good! What do you think of the weather, Polly?"

She was often a true prophet, with the instinct she shared with the lower creation. She peered at the fleecy sky.

"Wind coming." A sniff. "It won't rain."

"That's what I thought." A gate slammed on the other side of the farm, and Charlie said quickly, "Get back to bed, it's your ma! And hold your tongue."

Polly's playful reply was to put out that member and squeeze it between a thumb and finger, before she drew down the window. Charlie made for the cliff. She must leave Miss Plowden to luck. Anyhow, she was a good sailor. But Rachel might be crossed off the list. Ruth would help, flattered by sharing part of the secret, which she would guard tenaciously. Something that Rachel didn't know! Charlie did not care for the hunchback, who showed a preference for her company, and then behind her back complained that she was "common!" Standing by the Pirate's Rock, she studied the water again and smiled as a breeze fanned her cheek. It would be choppy to-morrow, not going to Muss with the current, but returning against the tide. Breakfast might be a long way off.

"Must take a sandwich in my pocket," Charlie told the puffins, and grinned. "A nice, fat slice of pork. That'll cheer her up!"

## CHAPTER II

MARIGOLD knocked, and entered the spacious room where Sybil sat, writing letters.

"Sorry to disturb you, mother, but the launch hasn't come back."

"What?" Mrs. Mappin turned her head, and glanced at the clock. "It's nearly eleven! What can have happened?"

"I was wondering if Cousin Selina was staying for the morning service."

"I don't think that's likely. It isn't permitted. Who went with her?"

"No one—I've asked! Ruth woke with a bad tummy-ache, so Rachel wouldn't leave her."

"But what about Miss Plowden? She generally goes."

"I know, but I don't think she wanted to be alone with the Deaconess. Not after what she said about Aunt Janet yesterday."

This was news to Mrs. Mappin, and she questioned the girl, who had heard it being discussed.

"Wasn't it hateful?" Marigold ended. "She's never called 'Miss Vickers.' Not even in her reviews."

"It was Mr. Chaytor's advice to take a *nom-de-plume*. If she wrote about doctors some readers might try to find a 'likeness.'" Sybil's voice was scornful. "And that may lead to a libel action. Nothing annoys an author more!" She paused. "I shall speak to Selina about her remark. I can't understand such a breach of good taste."

"Miss Plowden was furious, and so was Charlie. She's suffered enough as it is, without that old——"

"That will do," Mrs. Mappin checked her. "She's your cousin, remember."

"Well, I wish she weren't," Marigold said rebelliously. "Always making mischief! If that's religion I'm glad you've let me off. But I don't know where she can be. I went up to the top of the tower with the glasses and there wasn't a sign of the launch!"

"It hasn't turned rough?" Sybil asked anxiously.

"A bit choppy, that's all, and Charlie wouldn't stop for that. Not if Cousin Selina begged her to! She'd want her breakfast. Oh, did you like the way I cooked the haddock in milk? I put a drop of cream on yours."

"Thank you, darling. It was delicious." How pretty she looked, the mother thought, in the faded blue linen, with the golden glints in her nut-brown eyes. Quite right not to let her go to Muss with all those young airmen about. For since their arrival an aerodrome had been built on level ground beyond the hills. Her attention was diverted. "Wasn't that the front door?" she asked. "Let's go out."

They reached the main hall in time to see the Deaconess, a handkerchief pressed to her lips, mounting the stairs, assisted by Charlie.

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"How late you are! What happened?" Sybil asked the electrician.

"The engine broke down. I can't understand it, Mrs. Mappin, as I overhauled her yesterday."

From the Deaconess came a muffled wail:

"So rough! We were there for hours—but let me come into your room, Sybil?"

"You'd better take Marigold's arm. Charlie must want her breakfast."

"I do, but I'll be seeing to the engine as soon as I've had it. Stopped dead half-way home. I've never had such a thing happen before!"

"No," Sybil admitted, frowning. "And the Deaconess isn't a good sailor."

"She is not," said Charlie emphatically, feeling hollow herself, for she had abandoned the sandwich idea as too risky. "Shall I nip across to Dr. Janet and ask her to come?"

Sybil looked at Charlie thoughtfully, at her smug, sober countenance.

"I don't think we need disturb her. You'd better get some food."

Turning, she followed the other pair nearing the vaulted door, and caught them up as they reached the bright light in the bedroom.

"You must lie down, Selina. Try this sofa," Mrs. Mappin said, as kindly as she could, for she still resented the slur on Janet. "You don't want that wet handkerchief now."

But the invalid clung to it.

"I've lost my teeth," she mumbled.

"Good heavens! How did you do that?"

Marigold turned away, threatened by a giggle. She, too, harboured a suspicion of Charlie. Still, she couldn't have snatched the denture out of the Deaconess's mouth!

"Wait a minute." Sybil sprinkled some *eau de Cologne* on a clean handkerchief and passed it to her. "Would you like a little brandy?"

"No. I'd sooner lie still." She covered her sunken lips. "I've been terribly ill, rocking up and down. I must say Charlotte was kind, held my head and advised me to take my teeth out. I put them down on the deck, and when I looked a little later they'd gone! Charlotte was



busy at the engine, but she searched everywhere. "It's too dreadful," she moaned. "I haven't another set!"

"Never mind," Sybil said, with the calm of those who have preserved excellent teeth. "Everyone will understand."

Marigold was thinking that if Charlie had been the culprit the Deaconess would have accused her at once. Busy at the engine? She forgot the electrician's big feet and supple movements, a chance too good to miss as the launch rolled from side to side.

Now she must go carefully, Charlie thought, enjoying the good fare in the kitchen, retailing the news to Mrs. Brown.

"We must feed her on slops," said that worthy. "Though I don't know what she'll do. That dentist at Muss is very rough. So Amy complained."

"It's a bad job," said Charlie gloomily. "I only hope Mrs. Mappin won't haul me over the coals."

"I'm sure she won't. She thinks the world of you. Remember the night when the main fuse went and you got it right in time for supper?" Mrs. Brown refilled Charlie's cup. "You make a good breakfast and don't worry. She'll have to go to Edinburgh. That's where Mrs. Mappin took me and gave me my new set, paid for it too, bless her!" She disliked the Deaconess, and satisfied her curiosity: "Was she very sick?"

"Sick as a cat," said Charlie. "Over my best slacks, too."

"I'll clean them for you, if you'll put a new light in my bedroom. I hate doing it, not knowing if they're off or on."

"You can always come to me," said Charlie, and suddenly grinned. "She does look a sight without them!"

Mrs. Brown chuckled. At the other end of the Castle Marigold's face was pressed to her pillow, giving way to her stifled laughter. Good old Charlie! Presently, drying the tears of mirth, she went out, hoping to meet the electrician, and peeped into the library. Anna was in a chair, reading, and smiled when Marigold ended her story.

"Good egg! I should think it would take a fortnight to fix her up."

"Would it? Hurrah! I got chucked out when she was

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wailing about travelling without them and I suggested a gas mask!" Another giggle, as Anna laughed. "Do you know where Charlie is?"

"In the kitchen."

"All this time?" Marigold glanced at the other's book. "What are you reading?"

"A detective story, by Dorothy Sayers."

"Then I bags it next. Is it good?"

This form of literature was permitted, though Mrs. Mappin long ago had put gilded lattice-work over the open shelves, now locked, and she kept the key. Everyone had to return a borrowed volume without passing it on, and the same with the library boxes, one of Sybil's rules to safeguard Marigold from the trend of modern fiction.

"I've only just started it," Anna explained. "But it seems exciting."

Marigold took the hint. In the refectory she found Mrs. Arkwright, christened by Charlie, "Our Imy," on account of a Cockney accent. She was talking to Rachel, with Ruth on a low chair, listening. Her beady eyes brightened as Marigold poured out her news. The hunchback was longing to say she knew all about it, but was afraid of Charlie's wrath.

"How dreadful!" Mrs. Arkwright exclaimed. "No teeth? I wonder if I can do anything for her."

"Lend her your own?" Ruth suggested, and was corrected in the schoolteacher's best manner:

"You needn't be vulgar. You'll come to it yourself, one day."

The Deaconess, on her arrival, with her equine, aristocratic face, had stirred Amy's old dream of social advancement. "Rual Castle" had sounded so grand, with a vision of powdered footmen. A little damped at their interview on learning that the housework was shared, Amy had said:

"I don't mind that, though I've never learned to cook. It wasn't required at a Council school. Apart from the usual subjects, I taught dancing, the piano and French knitting, all useful to a girl who wants to improve her position. As she should." With an aggressive smile she had added, "I belong to the extreme Left."

Politics wouldn't affect Marigold at her age, Mrs. Mappin

decided, for Amy was to fill the gap between Nurse and a good governess. After two winters on the island the former had tearfully departed.

"You'll enjoy our communal life, then," Sybil had returned. "By the way, there will be no religious instruction. Marigold will choose for herself when she reaches a suitable age. I don't know to what creed you belong?" She saw Amy's hesitation and helped her: "Perhaps, like so many, you haven't one?"

Relieved, Mrs. Arkwright admitted the fact. That also, was not required in Council schools of the period. The children much preferred to sing "The Red Flag" to "Onward, Christian soldiers."

But Amy's opinions were changing. She led the hymns at the Deaconess's Sunday service, with "my experience of community singing," thumping out the accompaniment, and wrote to tell her old friends of her new one, "the Bishop's sister." One drawback remained in her conversion: she could not go with Selina to Early Service, for she had never been confirmed. After various excuses, she confessed this, and the Deaconess offered to prepare her. The others would find Amy in a secluded corner, learning her catechism at the ripe age of forty. Marigold, who once had glanced over her shoulder, would chip her with, "Are you M. or N.?"

Something in her present expression warned Amy, for even at ten her old pupil had been a handful, and she said hastily to Rachel:

"Shall we go out? A pity to lose this fine morning now there will be no service. We could sit in the bathing shed." Where a verandah with a bench running along it, connected the two dressing-rooms, and was shady at most hours of the day.

"Then I'll fetch my sewing," Miss Pedlar announced. "You coming, darling?" she asked Ruth.

To Marigold's relief, she agreed. Alone, the girl mounted the low platform and began to strum on the piano. Charlie might hear her and come. But when the piece ended no sound broke the silence, and she turned the leaves of the hymnal before her. Hearing a light, familiar step, she started to play again.

"What's that?" Charlie asked, closing the door.

"For Those in Peril on the Deep!" Marigold, laughing,

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jumped down and joined her friend. "You did it on purpose!"

"Did what?"

"Stopped the engine!"

"You ax no questions and you'll have no lies." Charlie grinned. "We might ha' got home a bit sooner, perhaps. But that's between you and me, so don't you get me into trouble."

"I won't," said Marigold earnestly. "But what about her teeth?"

"Must have kicked them overboard whilst she was bowing to the fishes. Ground bait? We must keep an eye on the lobsters!" Charlie guffawed, then clapped a hand over her mouth. "Anyone about?"

"Only Anna in the library."

"She won't split! But you be careful with the Gees. I didn't want Ma to suffer, so I gave Polly a hint. Are they coming up to dinner?"

"I don't know. They might if they heard the Deaconess was upstairs."

The same idea had occurred to Sybil, and after seeing Selina stretched on her bed she returned to her writing-table, to compose a tactful note: a good thing Mrs. Gee had not been on the launch when it broke down. Such a dreadful thing had happened to the Deaconess, etcetera. If Mrs. Gee had one of her nice cream cheeses, soft for the victim, would she bring it up when she and Polly came to dinner?

It was no good prolonging the breach, and the farmer, a sensible woman, would realise this and accept the olive branch. Marigold must take the letter. Naughty child! Sybil smiled involuntarily, remembering the gas mask. These had been fitted by the red-haired girl of the scene on the beach, now married to her fisherman, with two children. During the panic preceding Munich he had volunteered for the Navy, and since there was a vacancy at the post office Jean had returned there, to live with a sister who would look after the bairns. She also, took a share in A.R.P. work, and had enjoyed her visit to the Castle, surprised to see how Marigold had grown since the summer spent at the inn, which Mrs. Mappin had made her headquarters during the move. How bonnie the girl was with her long plaits of golden hair and dancing

eyes, Jean thought. A shame to keep her on the island, with no chance of meeting a man. Still, it wasn't her affair, and no sign of disapproval had appeared on her pleasant, freckled face.

Putting the note for the farm in an envelope, Mrs. Mappin's mind turned to the prospect of war, with such horrors as poison gas. Impossible, she held, and had laughed at Janet's suggestion that they should wear the gas masks once a week. But the news on the wireless was worse to-day. Even Mrs. Gee, a confirmed optimist, looked troubled, but did not enter into the argument following Amy's announcement that if war came it would be the fault of the Right, Capitalists, who thrived on munitions. The farmer was still on her dignity, beside Polly, her pretty, blowsy face sullen, but Mrs. Mappin was satisfied.

When the table had been cleared the company settled down to further entertainment supplied by the B.B.C., the Sunday custom, which permitted a surreptitious nap. Janet slipped away in search of Anna, who had gone back to her book.

"Am I disturbing you?" she asked the latter.

"Not a bit! Only a detective story. I can't stand the wireless turned on full blast." She made room for Janet on the window-seat. "Dinner went off all right. So much easier without the Deaconess?"

"Yes. She'll be off early to-morrow in Charlie's care. I should have said, Charlotte's," Janet laughed. "But that wasn't what I came to see you about." Her face became serious. "I do wish you could persuade Sybil that we're in for war. She ought to prepare for it, and she's done nothing! The stores we got in were partly used in the winter storms, and there's sure to be a run on the shops. You know what Muss is?"

"I can guess. I only saw it when I came," Anna reminded her. "But I quite agree with you." She thought for a moment. "I wonder if it would be any good to show Mrs. Mappin a letter I had from an old friend, the wife of the member for Helmsford. The Government hasn't the faintest doubt. Now everyone's blaming Chamberlain for having been weak with Hitler, America in full cry. But they always have their knife into us! It seems that lately it has leaked out that before he went to Munich

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he sounded the French Government, who said they weren't ready for war, and wouldn't come in if we declared it! So what could he do? Only play for time, to hurry on our defences."

"Sybil would agree. She has every faith in Chamberlain. As an arbiter of peace, unfortunately! I think it's a good idea to show her your letter. You might get a chance this afternoon, then come up to the cottage for tea and tell me how it went. Unless you want to paint?"

"No. I've finished, and I'd like to show you the result."

"I'd love to see it," said Janet. "Are you sending it to the same agent?"

"Yes, an old friend of Dad's, and he sold my last. I think this is the best thing I've done." Anna frowned. "The trouble is there's not enough variety here. I'd like to paint the harbour at Muss, if Mrs. Mappin would agree. I could do it from the launch on a still day. With Charlie as my chaperon I should be safe from any amorous adventure!"

"I know! It's absurd," Janet checked herself loyally. "The difficulty is that others might expect it."

"Who?" Anna asked bluntly. "Not the Gees or the Pedlars. They've no money. Mrs. Mappin brings them all they require. It's one of the rules, but there could be an exception."

"I was thinking of Marigold. She'll be seventeen next month and is getting restless. Still, I'll do all I can, Anna."

"Thank you, my dear. Otherwise"—her mobile lips took an upward tilt—"I shall go to Early Service, feel faint and remain on the launch! Mrs. Mappin couldn't object to that."

"The Deaconess would give you away."

"Be in her glory?" Anna suggested. "I do dislike that woman. Also, her parasite, Amy Arkwright. What was her story, exactly?"

"She was dismissed from a Council school where she taught, after a scandal, when in self-defence she admitted that she had been married for two years!"

Anna whistled.

"Was that it? Somehow, I can't see 'our Imy' involved in a wild romance. Why didn't she retire?"

"Because the man didn't earn enough to support them both. He'd been with the landlady for some years when Amy came, so the neighbours didn't guess. They had rooms on the same landing. That's how it began, I expect. At last a woman over the way noticed their shadows on the blind in Arkwright's bedroom, and having children at the school reported it. The landlady, a good soul, was in the secret, being sorry for the man, in bad health, with no one to look after him. In fact, during the last months of their married life he had to give up his job, and Amy was the breadwinner for both. At the interview she let out that he was consumptive, and round came the health authorities. They took out his window in bitter weather, and Amy had to share the room whilst hunting for work. The result was she developed pleurisy and was taken off to a hospital, her husband to another, where a bad attack of hæmorrhage finished him. Amy gave him a fine funeral to impress the neighbours, and ever since has blamed him for ruining her life!"

"Her passport to Rual?" Anna suggested, smiling. "But why, at the start, didn't she send him to a sanatorium?"

"They were all full. I remember the difficulties I had with my patients, not sufficient ready. The old story," said Janet. "Fine ideas, and procrastination. That Health Insurance scheme went wrong from the start, with panel doctors overworked, and underpaid. One of these days we shall be insured for everything to get out of the dole, and then there'll be no money left for food! It seems to go up and up! With another war——" Janet stopped abruptly, and laughed. "Go back to your Crime story! Much healthier!"

They parted, and Janet slipped past the refectory, where the door was open, emitting hot air and a Yorkshire voice, weighed down with gloomy prophecy. Marigold, who hated politics, was bored. She glanced at Miss Plowden, knitting, and at Rachel bent over the cotton dress. A reel fell to the floor and rolled. Marigold seized her chance, picked it up and returned it to the owner, then sidled out. For once, she had not been asked: "Where are you going?"

The island seemed deserted, and she made her way to the Pirate's Rock. She wanted to discover where Polly had climbed down, and there had been no chance yet free

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of companions. Peering over the edge she heard the far off drone of a plane. They didn't often come this way, for the aerodrome lay inland, and pilots seemed to avoid the coast. She moved towards the sound and searched the sky. There it was! A silver speck, growing larger. Excited, she watched it, as the noise increased. It seemed to be coming straight for the island, flying low, but it swerved aside and passed. How splendid it must be up there, master of the air, in a freedom she had never known. She gazed after it with a feeling of loss. It was circling round, caught by the sun—coming back! She did not guess what a mark she made on the open cliff, the wind moulding her dress to her youthful body, like the figurehead of a ship. But the pilot had seen her. He came down in a dive, so low that she could see his face, his laughing eyes and the flash of white teeth, then the wave of a hand. In that thrilling moment she could no more have helped waving back than avoid the shadow of the great wings that raced across the turf. What was he doing now? Mounting—she caught her breath—upside down! Completing the loop he straightened out, wagged his tail, and was off, heading in the old direction.

Guiltily, she looked around her. There was no one in sight. Waving to a man?

"I don't care," she said, half-aloud. "He looked nice. They can't *all* be bad."

There was that friend of Aunt Janet's, whom she saw when she went to town. He wrote—what was his name? Michael Chaytor. But he wasn't young, like the pilot. Sitting down on a rock Marigold conjured up his face. There was something familiar about it. Where had she seen those eyes before, blue like the flame of methylated spirits? She cast her mind back, and suddenly, she remembered. That boy at Worthing, older than herself, who had helped her to build a sand castle. She had been cross with him for taking her spade, and the next day he had brought another, superior one. That had been a still finer castle, with a deep moat round it, and they had watched the tide steal in and fill it, sharing the milk and buns that Nurse had brought. Those sands had been exciting, with a lagoon in the middle where the boy had sailed a small boat, and they had both splashed in after it, to be scolded by Nurse. He was always alone, seemed



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to have no people, then one day he failed to appear, and they never saw him again. Marigold smiled, remembering her childish despair, healed by Nurse, who took her in to Brighton and on the little railway that ran to Black Rock. If mother were like other people she might meet him again, and be sure that he was the same. What a mercy no one had seen her!

If she dawdled any longer she would be late for tea. She got up and walked down the path, meeting the Gees at the farm gate.

"Did you see that plane?" Mrs. Gee asked. "Came down so low! They shouldn't allow it. I was afraid when we lost sight of it behind the wood that it would fall on the farm!"

Marigold drew a breath of relief. The trees had hidden her from the pair returning early for the milking.

"It made an awful noise," she evaded. "All the same, I'd love to fly."

"I wouldn't," said Polly. "I'd be afraid."

"You weren't afraid to climb down that cliff," her mother said tartly. "Risking your neck! Never you do it again."

"I won't," Polly muttered.

She looked stupider than ever, Marigold thought impatiently. Only Charlie was fit to speak to among her companions. And Aunt Janet, of course. But she was old, like mother. Perhaps the Frenchwoman would be better; about thirty, the former had said, in reply to a question from Miss Plowden. Madame Ducroy, arriving early at Muss, would have time to look at the shops. Marigold felt envious, then a bright idea seized her. Couldn't she go in the launch and see Cousin Selina off? Only polite, wasn't it?

The moment she got in she suggested this to Sybil, who smiled, and shook her head.

"I didn't know you were so fond of her! There's no need, my dear. When they reach the harbour Charlie will ring up from the tobacconist's for the car, or failing that, a taxi." She looked into the girl's disappointed face. "Where have you been this afternoon?"

"Just wandering round." Marigold shrugged her shoulders. "What else is there to do on Sunday? Everyone eats too much and sleeps! I hope Madame Ducroy

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will be brighter. She isn't antediluvian, or half-baked like Polly."

"You'll have your lessons to-morrow," Mrs. Mappin said with dignity. A woman wasn't "antediluvian" at fifty.

"Not the whole morning, I'm making the bread. Miss Plowden has let me off. I don't mind, I like being with Mrs. Brown. She remembers where we used to live, and tells me about the shops." A mutinous light was in the girl's eyes, half-veiled by the full lids. "I suppose there are good ones in Edinburgh? A pity I haven't false teeth!"

"You'll be fortunate if you keep yours like I have. Now run away, I've a letter to finish. Anna came in and delayed me." Marigold was at the door when Mrs. Mappin checked her. "Have you straightened the drawers in your room? I never saw such a mess! You haven't? Then do it after tea."

This was served in the kitchen to save trouble, Mrs. Brown presiding at the well-scrubbed table, graced with a check cloth. Marigold was told off to wait on the Deaconess, whom she found sitting up in bed, looking deplorable, a book on her knee. When the girl appeared she snatched up her handkerchief, for she still resented the gas mask.

"Thank you," she said coldly, as Marigold placed the tray on the table beside her. "Buttered toast? I hope it's soft. What have you been doing this afternoon?"

Always the same old question!

"I walked to the Pirate's Rock. Were there pirates here once?"

"I expect so, in the old, uncivilised days."

"Well, it isn't much better now if we're in for another war! Why doesn't the Church stop it?"

"The Church has done her best, but if people won't listen—girls who refuse to be confirmed," Selina added acidly—"she can do no more."

"You mean the Church has lost its power?"

"Not at all," The Deaconess was vexed. With a shaky hand she filled her cup. "It's the irreligion of the age."

"What's made it irreligious?" Marigold asked, with an interested expression. "I mean, if people liked church they'd go there. They go to the cinema. They can choose now, too. In the old days they were fined if they didn't

show up on a Sunday. I'm doing that period. You were fined, as well, if you weren't buried in wool. Funny?"

"No. To encourage the wool trade." Cousin Selina sipped her tea, thinking how painfully ignorant the girl was. "A Government order, nothing to do with the Church."

"Then the Church has to obey the Government?" Marigold's lids hid her mischievous eyes, and her voice became more innocent than ever. "With all those bishops in the House of Lords?"

"The Church and the State work together," the Deaconess snapped. "There's no question of dominance. All bills have to be passed by the Upper House, *after* the Commons. Are you satisfied now?"

"Not quite," said Marigold genially. "But I'll ask Miss Plowden. I mustn't interrupt your tea." She retreated, to call from the door. "Oh, good luck with the dentist if I don't see you before you go!"

"Silly old thing!" she murmured, two-stepping down the passage, for Amy had taught her to dance. "I don't wonder Cousin Andrew turned her out! I wish I'd asked her if the Church approved of tidying drawers on the Sabbath. Anyhow, I'm not going to do it, but have a swim with Charlie."

If only they could go out to the Ram, a rocky islet in a direct line with the pool. This had been one of their secret pranks, rising at dawn. The sort of place Marigold thought where the pirates would hide a treasure! What fun it had been exploring together, though all they had found was the skull of a sheep, picked clean by the ravens, and a little pebbly beach on the farther side with an old post, the remains of a landing-stage. Charlie was a strong swimmer, so danger had been absent from the adventure in the pale, early light. The islet was screened from the Castle by the conifers on the cliff, though the tower stood out boldly, with the empty rooms above Marigold's. The view from the top one was her nearest approach to the world, and she sighed, remembering that four more years must pass before she came of age, when no one could stop her if she said, "I shall go to Muss to-day." Surely, she would have some money by then to spend at the shops—magical word! At present her whole wealth was a sixpence with a hole in it that Charlie had given her.

## CHAPTER III

RAIN followed during the night, confirming Irene's wisdom. Monday was always a busy morning. Sleeves rolled up in the bright kitchen Marigold kneaded the bread, under Mrs. Brown's supervision. They talked, the girl between little pants as she reached the heavy part.

"Miss Plowden says . . . they have beautiful . . . bread in France."

"It couldn't be better than ours," the housekeeper boasted. "I don't hold with French cooking. There's nothing to beat a good English joint when it's properly basted. A little harder, my dear. I must say the beef's good here, and the venison too. It makes a nice change. I remember long ago my sister's husband talking of it, being partly Scotch. His grandmother, a lady's maid, went up there with the family when they took a place for shooting, and she married a gamekeeper, what they call a gillie, the head one it was, in a heathenish way."

Marigold disentangled this.

"You mean it wasn't a proper marriage?"

"Not to my mind," Mrs. Brown said severely. "No church, not even a registry office, though it seems it's enough in this country. Now I think that's sufficient, so take this knife and make a cross—you know the way."

Marigold scored the dough neatly, and rubbed the flour off her hands.

"What did they do, then?" she asked, watching Mrs. Brown cover the bread and put it to rise near the fire.

"Just stood up before two witnesses and said they took each other for husband and wife. That was all. Her mistress was rather worried about it and asked a lawyer, but he said it was perfectly sound. That was a long time ago, as Joe's grandmother's been dead these forty years, but she never had any trouble, beyond rearing seven children and leading a hard life, her husband being fond of his whisky." She smiled at Marigold, absorbing the story. "Now you'd better wash your hands, have a glass

of milk and go back to your lessons. I'll see to the rest."

She fetched the girl what she called her "elevens," to include a slice of cake, Marigold in no haste to depart.

"I've never seen a wedding. It must be fine, with the beautiful dress and all the bridesmaids. There was one in the *Tattler* last week, with little children holding the train. Such ducks! I wish we had children here."

Mrs. Brown agreed. It would be nice to hear their happy laughter. Mrs. Gee had been saying the same; it seemed hard to have no grandchild at her age.

"Do you remember a boy at Worthing?" Marigold asked her, eking out the cake. "He used to build sand castles with me, and went off suddenly."

"I do, now you speak of it," the housekeeper responded. "A nice little lad, a gentleman's son, or Nurse would not have allowed it, though we didn't know who his parents were. Fancy your recollecting that! You spent your sixth birthday with him, sailing a boat, and I bought you some meringues for tea. Not that I like the ones in the shops, they're too hard." She looked at the clock. "You must go back to the schoolroom, my dear, or Miss Plowden will be scolding me."

Marigold hoped she would skip mathematics and go on to geography, which her governess always made interesting, with history and legend, but Miss Plowden kept to her schedule. She smiled, however, when Marigold pleaded in Irene's voice that the rain should have "kept the square roots down!" She was fond of the girl, trained by herself for seven years, so unlike the one whose tragic end had nearly ruined her own prospects, bringing from the parent, the coroner too, an unjust reprimand. The former, a widower, had thoroughly spoilt his daughter, proud of her daring and beauty. After a series of governesses, departing in tears, he had engaged Miss Plowden, who learnt, to her dismay, that her power was undermined by the father's weakness. Pamela was not only disobedient but a liar, and she resented tuition at seventeen, although she could not write a letter without a spelling mistake. Only a sharp lesson would bring her to her senses. The opportunity came with an invitation to a hurriedly arranged party in the neighbourhood. Miss Plowden refused permission to go. Until she had learnt to behave Pamela

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was unfit for society. (Which she shrewdly suspected was that of the Bright Young People!) There had been a scene, to which later the servants testified, with no chance of appeal, since the father was away. Suddenly, the girl had given in and apologised for her misdeeds, kissing her governess. She had gone quietly to bed, smuggling in a box of chocolates and a novel, Miss Plowden aware of both, but on the whole satisfied by the result of her ultimatum. She had looked in an hour later, to find her charge apparently asleep. As soon as the door had closed Pamela had sprung up and dressed. It would be easy to climb out of the window and down by the heavy ivy, cross the fields and appear, a heroine, at the party. In the schoolroom across the corridor the governess heard nothing until a scream broke the silence. Running into the girl's room she had found the bed empty, and the window thrown up. Below was a torn strip of ivy and something huddled on the path. There lay her pupil in her dance dress, with a broken neck!

For Miss Plowden worse was to follow. The father, off his head with grief, having listened to the staff's account of Pamela's cries and tears, had accused the governess of unwarrantable tyranny. At the inquest the coroner, who had his own reasons for keeping in with the local magnate, had held the same view. A high-spirited girl, as everyone knew and deplored her death, could not be treated as a child. Dismissed and under a cloud, for the Press had enlarged on the case, Miss Plowden could see no future employment commensurate with her gifts. It was when this truth became plain that Sybil's mother wrote and told her daughter the story. She had known, and liked, the governess in an earlier situation not far from the Hall, when she had coached a backward girl and got her into Newnham. They were all wild, Pamela's people, and she thought the governess had been strictly within her rights. The result of this was that Sybil, dissatisfied with Mrs. Arkwright, had arranged an interview in town, and invited Miss Plowden to Rual. Had she been at liberty to choose, she would not have accepted so young a pupil, but could now congratulate herself, for it had been unexpectedly interesting to mould the girl's intelligent mind. The only thing she did not care for was the absence of religious instruction, on which the Deaconess's arrival had set the

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seal, with Marigold's sense of humour. All Miss Plowden could do in conformance to Sybil's wishes was to let the girl see her own belief in an eternal purpose.

Geography over, Marigold was set an essay, to be written that afternoon.

"It shouldn't take you longer than an hour. Then you must get some exercise."

"Run round the island?" her pupil suggested. "I'm so sick of it! I'm going to ask mother if I can go on the launch for my birthday, have a picnic tea. So do back me up, Miss Plowden?"

"We must see what she says. It would be a nice change." For she privately agreed with Janet that the rules should be relaxed. "Now run along and wash your hands, my dear."

Reaching her room, a happy smile on her face, Marigold halted, aghast. In a heap on the floor were all her belongings, the drawers of the tallboy and dressing-table emptied. Anger leaped up in her eyes as she saw a blue ribbon crushed under a box of tennis balls. Mother's doing! She stamped her foot, turned, and tore back to the entrance hall in time to catch Miss Plowden.

"Come here!" She clutched the other's arm. "You must! Come and see!"

Bewildered, one foot on the stairs, the governess altered her course.

"Whoever has done this?" she asked, taking in the scene. "Not Polly, surely? Though it looks like one of her silly tricks."

"No, mother!" Marigold gulped to keep back her tears as she drew out the precious blue ribbon. "Look at this!"

"Unless you're certain you've no right to blame your mother. It might have been anyone." Miss Plowden, inwardly troubled, put an arm round the girl's quivering shoulders. "Do you know what I should do in your place?"

"What?" Marigold asked rebelliously.

"Put everything back neatly and keep silent. If it's been done out of mischief that person will expect a scene, and be disappointed."

"Score them off?" Marigold smiled involuntarily, unaware that her governess was thinking of Mrs. Mappin in

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one of her violent tempers. The very way the clothes were pitched down was suggestive. "I could, though it's an awful bore."

"I'll let you off the essay, and help you. Directly after dinner."

"You're a darling!" Marigold hugged her. "All right! I agree."

"Then come back to the schoolroom, and no one will guess you have been here. What about your hands?"

"Quite clean. I've been making bread!" At the elder woman's expression she added, "No, honestly, I washed them twice."

They reached the door just as the gong went, and joined the crowd, Miss Plowden lost in thought. She had acted rightly, she decided, and would be there if trouble broke out, a check on the mother's bitter tongue. As they took their seats she saw Sybil glance down the table, her eyes resting on her daughter. Luckily, Marigold was smiling at Charlie, who had just asked her to fish from the jetty that evening.

"They've had a good catch at the village. I saw the boat come in as I was handing the Deaconess ashore, heavily veiled. But I had my catapult, and I got a good shot at her friend, the fat old priest, walking away from the harbour." Charlie grinned. "He wheeled round, and the Deaconess bolted into the taxi! Like a rabbit into its hole."

Mrs. Mappin caught the last phrase.

"That reminds me. I must shoot some rabbits this afternoon. They'll soon be out of season. Will you come with me, Marigold?"

"I'd rather not. I hate to see things killed! Besides, I'm fishing with Charlie."

"Then you're to have the boat tied up inside the jetty, and go no farther. You understand?"

"Yes, mother." Marigold turned to Janet. "I'll bring you some fish for breakfast."

"How nice! Stay and have it with me? Is that allowed?" she asked Sybil.

"I'd sooner not. She'd be late for her housework."

Even that little pleasure denied her, Miss Plowden was thinking. How unwise it was to drive the girl into open rebellion. She had heard Marigold say to Charlie after a



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scene with her mother, "I won't stand it! I shall run away!" Not so difficult, after all, with the rowing-boat, which Janet had christened *The Last Hope*, since it could be used if the launch broke down to get to the mainland. Mrs. Arkwright created a diversion by asking if there were any letters.

"I didn't go up to the post office," Charlie replied. "The rule's to stay with the launch."

And that's one for you, her manner suggested.

"Were you expecting something?" Ruth asked Amy inquisitively.

"That's not your affair," her sister corrected, with unusual sharpness.

Every one at sixes and sevens, Janet thought, and sighed, remembering her old doubt when Sybil had unfolded the scheme. Perhaps, war might knit them closer together, this motley crowd of women dependent on Sybil's charity. Anna's letter had partially convinced the latter, and after lunch they were to make out a list of stores. Mustn't forget coke, to fill the huge cellar. Janet's mind wandered and she was surprised when Amy, who had been waiting at table with Polly, asked Mrs. Mappin if she might say Grace, in the Deaconess's absence.

"If you like," the other responded absently.

Amy obliged, and the company trooped out. Miss Plowden delayed Marigold in the hall until she had seen Janet and Mrs. Mappin reach the vaulted arch.

"We could have a breath of air first," she suggested. "Just round the garden, and in at your outer door."

They went down the steps on to the lawn and crossing it passed through the door in the opposite wall to the vegetables, where the silent Irene was already busy, preparing the soil for a fresh row of peas.

"Nice afternoon," Marigold called to her as they skirted the bed, to receive a nod in return. "Charlie says I-reen's clockwork has stopped!" she told Miss Plowden. "You put in a penny and nothing comes out! It's pretty true, though I like her; she works so hard. Which is more than Rachel does! I'm still waiting for my cotton frock. But then, she's one of mother's pets!"

"She has known her for a long time," Miss Plowden answered pacifically. "I didn't think your mother looked well at dinner. So flushed, and dark under the eyes."

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"She shouldn't drink red wine," the girl said in a hard voice. "Aunt Janet's always telling her not to. But mother won't obey, though she expects us to do it on the tick!" They had come to the line of conifers and Marigold swung to the right. "Let's get this loathsome job over!"

Reaching the Tower, they settled down to it, the governess insisting that the drawers should be dusted first. In the bedroom beyond with its Chinese carpet Mrs. Mappin was marking an Army and Navy Stores catalogue, with Janet at her elbow. She paused, to turn her head and listen.

"I wonder who that is with Marigold? Helping her, I suppose." She told Janet what she had done, and saw her frown. "You don't approve?"

"Candidly, no. You'd be furious if anyone did it to you, turned out all your private possessions."

"There's a slight difference in our ages," Sybil observed sarcastically. "She must learn to be tidy, and besides that she is becoming too independent. I don't think she ought to be so much with Charlie. I get very worried sometimes, Janet. I wish Marigold were more like me. In her character, I mean."

The hopeless desire of many mothers, Janet thought, in a world that moves on. Then another idea struck her.

"You surely don't think she resembles Dr. Mappin? There isn't a spark of cruelty in her! Why, she can't even bear to see rabbits shot."

Sybil did not respond, staring out of the window on to the lawn, which Irene was rolling. After a moment she said:

"Let's leave this list until later. There's something I want to tell you." She rose and moved to a sofa. "Come and sit here." Propping a cushion behind her, she went on, "I don't feel I shall make old bones, and you ought to know when you take my place. It may help you with Marigold. Though I don't know how to tell you." She drew a deep breath, and brought out with an effort, "Luther was not her father."

Janet hid her astonishment. To have lived with a woman all these years in a close bond of friendship, and never to have guessed her secret! She became aware of Sybil's tense attitude.

"I'm the last person to blame you," she said gently. "With the life you endured, robbed of love and even affection. Tell me about it, my dear."

"I will." Sybil breathed again. "I don't regret it," she added, almost fiercely. "Although I suffered cruelly in the end, but thank God, Marigold has no German blood!"

"That's a blessing," Janet agreed, wondering whom the lover had been.

"Yes, but she's her father's daughter. It was Aylmer Leigh." Sybil saw her friend's surprise. "No one guessed it. As a small child there wasn't a likeness, for she was much fairer then, like Luther, but now her hair has deepened in colour, and although his eyes were blue she has Aylmer's long, full lids. I'm afraid his temperament, too. Which is why I am at times severe with her, and keep strictly to the rules. He was a passionate man, who took his pleasure and passed on, careless of the consequences." Sybil's voice became harsh. "Fickle and heartless!"

"Aren't you over-anxious, my dear?" Janet asked. "I don't see a trace of that in Marigold. Look at the way she sticks to Charlie, her earliest friend, and Miss Plowden, who often corrects her. She may be warm-blooded and full of vitality, but when she meets a man she can love—inevitable, and you must face it, Sybil—I think she'll be true to him, make a good wife and mother." To soften the blow she added, "Like you."

"But I haven't been a good wife," Mrs. Mappin reminded her, with a faint smile. "Selina would say I was a desperate sinner! The truth is that when I met again the man I had loved as a girl I lost my head." She saw the grey eyes open wide. "Yes, the Leigh I'd been engaged to secretly nine years before, and had never seen since he went off to America. Did you ever go to Aylmer's cottage, in the lane behind our house?"

"I was taken there once, to a cocktail party when he settled in. And how charming he'd made it! A born artist. He did so well with his studio portraits that I've often wondered why he left."

"Because Marigold was coming." Sybil saw Janet frown. "He didn't expect that. I'd been childless for eight years, and we were desperately in love! That cottage had belonged to the coachman in Dr. Thomson's time, and

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he sold it when he built the garage. It was too easy, through the door in the garden wall. When it was safe Aylmer used to put a Toby jug in the window, and nobody seemed to use the lane. We'd planned to go to America and let Luther divorce me—it wouldn't matter there—but a child complicated everything. I couldn't leave it in Luther's care." Sybil shuddered. "And the Court would have given it to him. Aylmer wouldn't understand this; he argued that I shouldn't have time to get fond of a baby and that after the first wrench I'd forget it, married to him. Another thing was he loved a wandering life, and a child would have been a handicap. When Marigold says she'd love to travel I hear his voice! He couldn't bear anything that threatened his liberty; fell out with his people when they were shocked at his buying the old photographer's business. A Leigh of Leigh Court!" Sybil mocked. "After the years in America he simply laughed at them, said he'd charge so much that they'd come to borrow money! His book of landscape photography had done well in New York, was reproduced by a London publisher and followed by a show. He wasn't an unknown man, could have been a painter, I always thought, if he'd had the patience to study. Anyhow, he was a success. The rich manufacturer's wives all wanted their 'Aylmer Leigh' portrait, for he brought out the best in them, invited him to their houses—but I'm getting away from the point!"

"You are, rather," Janet agreed. "Didn't Dr. Mappin have any suspicion?"

"I've never been sure. After Aylmer left, Luther used to ask, 'Where's your photographer?' Or perhaps, say that 'love was fleeting'—things like that! But he never accused me openly. He liked Aylmer, used to ask him in to Sunday supper, music the link between them, and play to him in the firelight, whilst we sat in the shadows——" Sybil broke off, and Janet could see the tears in her eyes. "Stupid of me!" She brushed a hand across them. "Even now it hurts, for he left without saying good-bye. A little boy brought me a letter when Luther had started on his round. Aylmer wrote that he wasn't going to spoil my life, and the only solution was a clean break. In other words, he was tired of me! I wasn't at my best three months before Marigold's birth."

"No wonder you had a bad confinement!" Janet broke

out indignantly. "He might have had the decency to wait until you'd recovered. You hadn't quarrelled?"

Sybil shook her head.

"Only held to my point, that I couldn't desert my baby. Do you wonder I hate men? First my husband, then Aylmer." Sybil found her handkerchief and used it. "I don't want to talk of it any more, it was over so long ago, but you'll understand what you'll have to cope with when I'm gone. You will be Marigold's guardian, and hold the island in trust for her."

"Don't talk like that! You'll live for years, if you'll take care of yourself. What is it?" Janet asked, for Sybil had turned her head.

"Marigold. I'd forgotten her! I must go and see if she's tidied her room."

"Not yet," Janet pleaded. "Rest a little, and do it after tea. Let's finish this list."

"No." Stubbornly, Mrs. Mappin rose, and went to the glass to tidy her hair. "How *old* I look!"

"Nonsense!" Janet followed her, and pulled down the linen coat that disguised the spreading hips. "If you must see the child be nice to her. She's at a difficult age, Sybil, still in the schoolroom, but fully developed as a woman. Don't you remember how you felt at seventeen?"

"I had to obey my mother."

"But you weren't happy." Janet smiled, to take the sting out of the next words: "And you don't want to pay it back on Marigold, who is really fond of you. Naturally, she feels dull among a lot of middle-aged women. You had your young friends, rode, and went to parties." Her voice dropped a note. "You hadn't to climb a tower to see a forbidden world."

"She has never known anything else."

"But she's heard of it, through her lessons, and listening to the others. I can see no reason why she shouldn't come with us to Muss. Look at the shops, her fond desire. It might be disillusioning!"

"It wouldn't be fair to the rest, just because she is my daughter. Besides that, the town is full of young airmen, who would be sure to stare at her. Put ideas into her head! No, Janet, you're very sweet, but I know best."

With which, Mrs. Mappin opened the bathroom door and passed to the farther one. "Oh, it's you, Miss

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Plowden," Janet heard her say. "I thought it was Charlie, and I don't care for her to be in this part of the house."

Not an auspicious start, Janet thought, as the latch clicked. Was there anything more difficult than making peace between mother and daughter when the latter ceased to be a child, and the former refused to acknowledge this?

In the tower room Mrs. Mappin looked round her. Miss Plowden was folding the last jumper on the bed, thinking she had never seen a girl with such shabby clothes.

"This is better," Sybil observed.

"Yes." Marigold shut the drawer in the dressing-table, and turned. "Someone's been making hay here! It was Polly, I expect. Just like her!"

"I did it. To teach you to be tidy," Mrs. Mappin said coldly.

"Oh?" Marigold smiled. "It got me out of writing an essay, anyhow!"

"Won't you sit down, Mrs. Mappin?" Miss Plowden proffered a chair. "You oughtn't to be standing."

"I can't stay. I'm making out a list of stores." Sybil turned again to Marigold. "If you've finished there's plenty of time to write your essay now."

"A little late, isn't it?" the governess suggested pleasantly. "She ought to have some exercise. But tomorrow we must work, with the holidays so near. No more interruptions, I hope."

Inwardly furious, Sybil said in a chilly voice:

"Mrs. Brown called her off to make bread, I hear, but if you'd come to me, Miss Plowden, I could have rearranged it. I leave these matters to your judgment."

"But, mother"—Marigold was up in arms—"you can't blame Miss Plowden for making my room in a mess. She's been perfectly sweet helping me!"

"It's your own fault for disobeying. I told you to tidy those drawers yesterday." Mrs. Mappin's eyes flashed, a sign of rising temper. "You're to write that essay after tea, instead of fishing with Charlie."

"Oh, mother——" Marigold began.

It was hopeless. Sybil had opened the bathroom door and she made a stately exit. A barren victory, she thought, her heart beating quickly. She had half a mind to dismiss

the governess. But she couldn't, without some serious offence.

Janet, poring over the list, looked up, to see a stormy face.

"It was Miss Plowden," Sybil said, and burst into tears.

## CHAPTER IV

ON Wednesday Janet went to Muss, and brought back the letters. There were three for Mrs. Mappin, one in her brother's handwriting, which she opened first.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed after reading the commencement. "Mother is ill again! They're having a consultation, afraid it is kidney disease."

"How old is she?" Janet asked.

"Seventy-two, or more—she never tells us! Bernard thinks I should go to her. But I *can't*, with Madame Ducroy coming!" Sybil read on. "He points out that if war started I mightn't be able to travel. That dreadful journey again!"

"Where is your brother now?"

"At Chelsea Barracks—but wait a minute!" Her eyes returned to the page. "Yes, he ran down for a night, and he says she asked for me. That settles it! I must go."

"I'm afraid so." Janet was thinking that it was better than waiting day after day for news delayed at Muss. "If you didn't, and anything happened, you'd regret it. I'm so sorry, my dear."

"Let's settle it, then; though it couldn't have come at a more inconvenient time. I could receive Madame Ducroy, and take the midday train on Friday." Into the brown eyes came a softer expression. "I'd like to see my old father again, but as you know I don't get on well with my mother. She can be so trying! Lays down the law, and expects everyone to obey her."

"She mayn't now she's ill." Janet repressed a smile. How true it was that the faults we condemn in others are frequently our own. "You'll want a sleeper. I'd better go straight back to Muss and secure one."

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"If you will?" Sybil looked at the clock. "You'll be late for dinner, so have a glass of sherry and a biscuit first."

"Thanks—and Charlie will need a sandwich. Sorry to rush off in this way, but we'll talk when I return."

Sybil could generally sleep in the train, Janet remembered, so it mightn't hurt her, and would take her mind off her health, on which she was brooding. Reaching the schoolroom door, moved by a sudden impulse, she put her head in.

"Miss Plowden? Could you spare Marigold for a few minutes? Mrs. Mappin is in trouble." She explained briefly. "And she's alone."

"Of course." Another interruption, the governess was thinking, but relented as the girl sprang up with a quick, "Poor mother!" She pulled down her pupil's jumper, badly knitted and too large. "Now you can go. Be quiet with her, my dear."

One of Marigold's virtues was that she never bore malice. Tapping at Mrs. Mappin's door, she called softly:

"It's me, mother. Can I come in?"

"Yes." Sybil looked round. "What is it?"

"Only to say I'm so sorry! Is Grannie very ill?"

"I'm afraid so." At the love in the young face Sybil opened her arms and Marigold hugged her. "Do you remember Grannie?" she asked curiously when the girl had released her. "It's a long time since you went to the Hall."

"Only vaguely." Marigold thought back. "I remember a big room full of flowers, and that I dropped crumbs on the carpet. You made me pick them up!"

Mrs. Mappin smiled.

"I expect I did."

"And Grannie said, 'Don't worry the child!' She was pretty, smaller than you, and she had a little dog on her lap with bright eyes and silky hair. She didn't seem very old."

"No." Mrs. Mappin's expression changed. "She has always taken care of herself, and your grandfather spoils her." She was thinking that selfish people with beauty and charm led the happiest lives. In a flash she saw herself as a débutante at a dinner-party, overlooked, all heads turned to the hostess, radiant in a Worth gown. Some-



thing of the old resentment was in her voice as she asked, "Oughtn't you to go back to your lessons? We mustn't upset Miss Plowden."

"If you don't want me? It's literature, the poets. Oh, mother!" Her face lit up. "Do you know, 'Tiger, Tiger, burning bright'?"

"I've read it, I believe," Sybil evaded. Not a good education, everything stunted for Bernard's sake. "You've just an hour left before dinner, so off you go!"

Well, that was over, Marigold thought, with a faint disappointment, which she did not attempt to analyse. It passed swiftly when Miss Plowden showed her an illustrated copy of Blake found in the library, with its strange pictures facing his poems. The governess was on delicate ground, with religion banned. It had been the same with Milton, the pupil allowed to read sonorous passages but not the whole of *Paradise Lost*. She must have a queer jumble of ideas between the Deaconess and her mother's agnosticism; a great pity, for with her warm and impulsive nature she needed some guiding light. Miss Plowden made up her mind to approach Mrs. Mappin again on her return.

The news of her coming departure went round, with diverse reactions. Mrs. Gee was glad. She had never forgiven Sybil for her treatment of Polly. Rachel and Irene were sympathetic; Ruth still more so, hoping for a present from town; Amy dissatisfied, for she did not like Janet. The latter was subtly conscious of a respite; now she could get on with her book. She wondered if Sybil's father and brother, at their best in sickness, would modify her obsession, which Janet understood better since the story of Aylmer Leigh. Watching Mrs. Brown cut a substantial sandwich for Charlie she thought that what Sybil needed, like most of the women here, was love.

Later in the day they discussed arrangements.

"Do you want me to sleep here?" Janet asked.

"There's no reason. If anyone were ill Charlie could fetch you. You might as well have your breakfast in peace. Mrs. Brown can arrange the meals, though you'll have to shop."

"But what about Marigold? Perhaps, Miss Plowden——"

"No," Sybil interrupted, with a wry face. "I hate people in my bed! Last time Selina made it smell of hair

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

lotion. Besides, I should have to put things away, and it isn't worth it for a week. Marigold is never nervous. Why should she be? No one can get on to the island. I shall insist, however, that she closes the outer door. Polly might start wandering again, though I think she's had her lesson."

"I'm sure of it. Still, it seems a bit lonely for the child."

"She can always ring for Mrs. Brown, on the same floor," Sybil said impatiently. "Don't spoil her! I shall lock up this room and give her the key, to dust it. You might see she does. By the way, it's her birthday on Saturday. I must bring her something from London."

"A pretty dress?" Janet suggested, and saw Sybil frown.

"There's nothing to wear it for, and the others might be jealous. I shall find something useful." She glanced at her notebook. "Selina! I'd forgotten her, but I hope she won't be back before I am. If so, hold your own, Janet. You are mistress here during my absence." A twinkle came into her eyes. "I had better ask her to 'support' you. A gentle hint?"

"I won't let her tread on me," Janet laughed. "But I hope she'll be pleasant to Madame Ducroy. That divorce sticks in her throat! What did happen, exactly? You've never told me."

"I was going to, and someone interrupted us, a case where your belief in a *marriage de convenance* went astray. The man was twenty years her senior, ripe for settling down and anxious to found a family. Unfortunately, her first baby died, and when it seemed unlikely that she would have another he lost interest in his wife. He was the head traveller for a silk house in Lyons, so had plenty of opportunities of consoling himself! Philosophical, Madame Ducroy made the best of it, until she met a younger man, and lost her heart to him. A passion returned, but she kept him at arm's length. At last matters grew unendurable, her husband openly unfaithful, and she decided to divorce him. This meant being estranged from her family and her Church, but she went through it last year." Sybil's voice became bitter. "And then the man she intended to marry backed out of it! His excuse being that his parents would not give their consent, necessary in France. So the poor woman fell between two stools! She

came to London, where she had friends, and tried to find employment. The rest you know. I liked her, so intelligent, and thought she would be a nice change here." Sybil was smiling now. "I warned her about Marigold, not to put worldly ideas into her head, talk of parties and clothes, and she quite understood this, was very simply dressed herself."

Simply, but with her nation's clever taste, colour subdued, and the line perfect. When Mrs. Mappin sent for the girl next day Marigold knew a sudden excitement. There was something about the cut of the grey suit and the small black hat with its eye-veil that she had never seen before. A touch of white at the throat threw into relief the dark eyes with their arched brows, and the delicately reddened mouth.

"This is my daughter," Sybil announced.

What beauty! the Frenchwoman thought. Even in those shocking clothes. Here, on a desert island, forbidden to man? She held out her well-gloved hand and pressed the slim, brown fingers, as Marigold said politely:

"I hope you had a good journey?"

"Not so bad, ze sea tranquil, and I am not—'ow you say? Ze clever sailor." She smiled, showing small, even teeth that matched the pearls in her ears. "Unlike you, I expect, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, please call me Marigold! Everyone does." She was not going to confess that she never went out in the launch. "Are you fond of swimming, Madame Ducroy?"

But here her mother checked her, turning to the guest.

"I expect you'd like to see your room? Marigold will take you up. I hope the luggage is there by now."

"I bring too much, I fear, madame, and make you a thousand pardons. But I 'ad nowhere to leave it."

"That doesn't matter. What you do not require can go into the tower, next door to you." Sybil glanced at the clock. "Dinner will be in twenty minutes. Wouldn't you like a glass of wine?"

"*Merci, madame.*" She saw that Sybil misconstrued this and added, "My stomach is a little uneasy still. *Tiens!* I make an error, forgetting zat in zis country you call it your 'digestion.'"

Marigold laughed. What a delicious person!

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"I wish I could speak French as you do English," she exclaimed.

"Eet will come." Madame Ducroy smiled at her. "We will converse wiz mutual profit, for you give me your good accent. We mount, *alors*? I feel zat my 'airs are unmade from ze wind of ze crossing."

Amused, Sybil watched the dissimilar pair depart. It would not hurt Marigold to learn that her new friend considered neatness essential. Not pretty, but with the super-feminine charm that achieves the same effect in France. A good contrast to Charlie.

She said as much to Janet as they waited for the gong, then took her place at the head of the table where her new guest would sit on her right, with Miss Plowden facing her. The others seemed on their best behaviour; conversation dragged, and Madame Ducroy filled the pauses abhorrent to her Gallic soul, whilst studying the company. Something in Clara Parr's brisk movement on her low heels as she waited with Polly caught the Frenchwoman's attention. A hospital nurse? A good guess, for Clara had been a trained one, and had married a patient after a long case, an elderly man loth to part from her, who had decided that the wife he had not seen for thirty years was in her grave.

The newcomer's eyes lingered on Anna and Janet with a feeling of relief when they spoke to each other, but *mon Dieu*, what a collection! Even in a provincial convent that took in *pensionnaires* you would not meet its like, she decided. The girl they called "Polly" was a *crétin*, and the scarred one in slacks she would certainly avoid. She did not care for the type, although it frequently had brains. Unaware of this gross mistake, Charlie glowered at Marigold, wrapped up in the new arrival. Mrs. Gee, the latter could understand, a typical *fermière*, and she praised the excellent butter, thereby acquiring merit, for Mrs. Gee said in a curiously aggressive voice that Polly had made it. Poor woman, Madame Ducroy thought. It was always so, the idiot the mother's pet. Here Clara handed her a boiled pudding, incredibly tasteless, and she said brightly to Mrs. Mappin that she prided herself on her cookery.

"We must make good use of you, then," the other responded. "It is difficult to vary the menu on an island.

We have our own cows, poultry, pigs, and rabbits, with lobsters at times, and—I think that is all! Except fruit and vegetables.”

“But, madame, what more do you desire! Ze fresh eggs and plenty of butter, it is a chef’s paradise! Wiz salad and ze little ’erbs. I go to see zem after *déjeuner*, if you permit?”

“Go wherever you like, at any time,” Mrs. Mappin said pleasantly. “The only place I reserve for myself is our small suite off the hall. There, I feel, I can rest undisturbed.”

“In all zis great castle? *C’est inoui!*” Madame Ducroy’s flattery was sincere. “In France, by example, hospitality is for ze family, as a rule.”

“My family is not very large,” Sybil, smiling, pointed out. “One daughter!”

“Now, yes. But zere will be ’er children to be spoilt by ze *grandmaman!*” She saw she had made a mistake and quickly retrieved it. “Not yet, she is still a child. Zere is an innocence about ’er zat touches me ’ere.” Her hand went to her breast. “One can see ’ow well she ’as been brought up.”

Her dark eyes slipped to Miss Plowden, to include her in the compliment.

“I hope so,” said the governess calmly. “Time will prove. Do you know the South of France well, madame? I have spent enjoyable days there, *surtout en Provence.*”

They drifted into French, Madame Ducroy delighted to find someone who had stayed at Avignon, her own early home. Glum looks were exchanged between the stolid group near Janet, which shared the British mistrust of a foreigner that puzzles Americans, with their ’hybrid blood.

“Painted,” Amy whispered to Clara when the latter resumed her seat.

Ruth caught the word and passed it on to Rachel, who sourly agreed.

“Has she been on the halls?” Charlie breathed to Marigold, and scored a bad mark.

Janet looked on and enjoyed the comedy. Once she caught Anna’s wicked eyes and guessed her thought when she asked:

“When is the Deaconess returning?”

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

In a fresh pause they could hear Madame Ducroy's interested voice:

"'Ave you ze savage strawberry? In France we eat a cream cheese like zis wiz it. Delicious!"

And Mrs. Mappin's polite correction:

"I fancy there are a few *wild* strawberries in the wood. We have the cultivated sort, and very good they are."

"Ah, your Engleesh fruit! It is wonderful, ze so big grapes and ze peaches. I stop to look at zem in ze windows, and zen recover my pride." Madame Ducroy smiled brilliantly. "Our flower-shops are bettaire, no? So well arranged wiz ze preety ribbons?"

"Ribbons?" Marigold had seized upon the word. "Do they sell them in flower-shops abroad?"

"If you weesh, to adorn a gift. But zey are always on ze baskets and bouquets as a mark of elegance."

"I wish I lived in France!"

Everyone laughed and, dinner being over, Amy said Grace. Madame Ducroy crossed herself. Charlie did the same, to be kicked under the table by Marigold, who presently drifted out with the absorbing stranger.

Alone with Janet, Sybil asked, a shade nervously:

"What do you think of our new guest?"

"It's rather too early to say. Personally, I'm enjoying her, and I don't see that she'll hurt Marigold, if that's what you want to know. She's far too shrewd." Janet began to laugh. "She is certainly not a 'savage strawberry'!"

"Wasn't that funny?" Sybil laughed too. "Though she speaks very good English, considering that she has only been over here four months. I was amused to see Amy's face when, naturally, she dropped her aitches. An air of triumph! Poor Amy is out of it, as she can't speak French. It was really as good as a play to watch them all, but they'll take to her in time. A brave woman, with her air of gaiety, which must cover a sore heart."

Janet agreed, with a reservation. It was strange that Sybil, so reasonable in many ways, should always blame the man, and it laid her open to deception. Madame Ducroy had played her cards well, but Janet did not believe her to be a saint. Still, the main thing was to get Sybil off without any fresh worry, and Janet reminded her of her packing.

After a tour of the kitchen garden, where Madame Ducroy could only find mint, sage and thyme, as no one seemed to have heard of chervil or tarragon, Marigold returned to her lessons, looking forward to a free hour ahead when she had promised to help her new friend. Upstairs, in the room with its bright chintzes and narrow white bed, the latter opened the small wardrobe and gazed with dismay at six hooks in the back. Wherever would she put her dresses, with that shelf underneath, constricting the space? Better pack them away; to get out of fashion—she sighed—as she certainly would not need them here. Moving to the window she could see a woman hoeing, her skirt tilted up over thick legs and deplorable shoes. Just like a peasant at home, with the same dulled brain, she concluded. If Pierre could see her now how he would laugh! But he had approved of the scheme. London was no place for his *chère amie* when the Boche came over with his bombs, and it was hopeless to think of starting a hat shop. She could economise and study her health. No digging for her, *par exemple*! She would concentrate on cookery, which she enjoyed, and have something fit to eat. Unfastening a solid trunk, she lifted out an evening dress, shook it, and regretted the energy of Scottish porters. Everything must be folded again.

When at last Marigold came up the room was littered, and she halted, amazed, to drink in the scene.

"What lovely things! May I look?"

"But naturally, *ma belle*." Madame Ducroy smiled at the girl's excitement. "You are fond of ze preety clo'es? And 'ave some yourself, wizout doubt."

"Mother won't let me." Loyalty stirred. "There's no need for them here, and I was only six when we came. What are these?" A pair of peach-coloured knickers edged with beige ruffles of lace. "Do you *wear* them? Aren't you afraid?"

"Of what, *chérie*?" The Frenchwoman was convulsed with mirth.

"That you'd spoil them." The girl bent over a peignoir on the bed. "And look at this!"

The half-hour that followed was full of excitement. Her admiration, untinged by envy, won the other's heart. Poor child! When Madame Ducroy learnt of her passion for ribbons she found one with little cornflowers on a maize

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ground, cut it in half and tied the long plaits, Marigold speechless with joy.

"Your 'airs—no, 'air, is it not?—is a miracle! Never cut it because of ze mode. Men would go mad about it!"

"But I never see a man! Mother won't let me go to Muss."

"She know what would 'appen! You would be kid-snatched!"

Marigold laughed uproariously.

"Kidnapped, you mean. It would take a strong man to carry me off!"

"Believe me, 'e will come!"

"He couldn't get on to the island." The girl's face sobered. "I say, you mustn't talk like this before the others, or there'll be trouble. They hate men." She studied the pale, piquant face. "Don't you?"

"*Ma foi, non!*" Madame's laugh rippled out. "Zey 'ave zeir uses. But I will be sage. I remember what your *maman* tell me. So zis is a leetle secret between us?"

"Rather! You see," Marigold went on earnestly, "they have all been ruined by men."

"*Pas possible!*" Madame Ducroy threw out her hands. "Zat girl wiz ze face like a moon? And ze one who t'ank ze *bon Dieu* for all she 'ave receive? I cannot believe it! But you must tell me zeir 'istories."

Here the gong rang out.

"That's tea! We must go down," Marigold warned her. "Mrs. Brown doesn't like us to be late."

Startled, she watched the other lock the door and pocket the key.

"Eet is safer," the Frenchwoman remarked. "I do not trust zat leetle *bossue*. She 'as been in once already."

"Ruth? She wouldn't touch anything. She's curious, that's all; her sister is a dressmaker. Did your lovely things come from Paris?"

"No, most of zem from Cannes. I 'ave a sister live zere, and when I expect to marry again I go to 'er for my trousseau." She caught Marigold's side-long glance, and wondered how much she knew. Better be prudent. "Zen my fiancé, 'e die. But we will not talk of my sorrow. Not to anyone, please. I try to forget, though you, who 'ave ze good 'eart, tempt me. One leetle moment!" At the head of the stairs she drew a vanity case from her bag,



opened it and powdered her face, then touched up her lips, to Marigold's deep interest. "Now we descend."

The time seemed past for condolences, but the girl slipped a hand through her arm. Dead? How brave she was! So that was a bride's "trousseau"? Conscious of her silence, Marigold explained that Mrs. Brown had been with them for twenty years, was a perfect dear, and taught them cooking. A useful hint. Madame Ducroy went out of her way to charm the housekeeper, praised the cake, and apologized for refusing tea.

"I cannot accustom myself," she explained. "And I 'ave a leetle digestion-ache from ze journey. To-morrow I try. I 'ope you will teach me ze Eenglish specialities. Ze plom-pôuding, yes?" She caught Miss Plowden's amused expression and gave a silvery laugh. "I say it wrong, per'aps?"

Her high spirits were infectious. When Mrs. Brown saw the new ribbon on Marigold's plaits and the girl's delight she thawed, and said pleasantly:

"You might try a little cooking to-morrow. 'Can you make pea soup?"

Anna rescued Madame Ducroy from a further catechism. She was interested to learn that the latter understood modern painting, and also, was fond of music, singing the form it took with her. It would be a relief to get away from crooners on the wireless, Anna suggested, and the other agreed. She could see no charm in a *voix de souris constipée*!

"What's that?" Ruth demanded.

Madame obligingly translated, and a shocked silence fell on the kitchen, broken by an unexpected chuckle from Mrs. Gee, who had handed over the milking to Polly.

"You're right! I've heard mice squeak just like them singers."

Marigold breathed again, and looked at Charlie, who winked.

"That did it!" she murmured, as they moved out together. "Our dear Imy has never heard the word in her high circles! I'm beginning to like your Frenchie. Coming for a swim?"

The girl hesitated, for she longed to see more of the treasures upstairs.

"All right," she agreed. "In half an hour? I'm too

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full of cake now!" For she mustn't hurt Charlie's feelings.

Janet joined them at the pool, glad to see the pair larking in the water. She mistrusted this new idea of Sybil's that the electrician was not a good influence. It might be a mother's jealousy, both for her daughter and of her. Janet had known this develop among her patients, though generally owing to men, who transferred their allegiance to the younger generation. Hard to bear for a woman just past her prime, but she could sympathise with the daughter's reaction: "Mother has had her fun! It's my turn now." There were few things so rare as a graceful acceptance of age. Poised on the diving-board, Janet thought, "One doesn't *feel* old, that is the trouble."

Michael Chaytor had recently written a play on the subject, to follow up his first success on the stage, which with his usual diffidence he had not expected. Janet had been full of enthusiasm, on her last London visit two years ago. Good novelists thrive, but the stage seemed sunk in apathy since the "talkies" had appeared. They provided excitement without any mental strain. Easy pleasure had become the rule, and easy work, to include that of the politicians, who talked and never acted. The lowest level had been reached when Italy attacked Abyssinia, the League of Nations powerless. Not altogether Britain's fault, Janet decided, shaking back her wet curls, with the French too weak, unwilling to fight, and farther back the shelving of all responsibility by the United States. What would President Wilson have thought of that?

It would be good to meet Michael again and talk such matters over, but there wasn't a chance of this. Sybil must be her first thought. She saw her off the following day, with every possible comfort. She seemed now to enjoy the idea of a change and some shopping in town, despite her anxiety for her parent. Janet returned in time to avoid a thunderstorm that broke during dinner with a loud peal.

"I hope it doesn't mean bad weather coming," Miss Plowden remarked. "We get so much rain here."

"Not rain," said Polly. "Heat."

"Good!" Marigold exclaimed. "It's my birthday tomorrow. There! I forgot to ask mother if we could go

out in the launch for a picnic tea. *Couldn't* we, Aunt Janet?" she pleaded.

"What do you think?" Janet, tempted, had turned to Miss Plowden, who responded thoughtfully:

"I don't see why not. After all, there's no rule against it, and anyone can go to church at Muss." She smiled across at Marigold. "You'd enjoy it? Your own party."

"I should think I would!"

"But we mustn't land," Janet stipulated. "Your mother wouldn't like that."

"All right!" The girl was wildly excited. "You'll come? And Charlie, of course." Her shining eyes turned to the stranger. "Would you care for it, Madame Ducroy?"

"I sink not, *chérie*. I am—ow you say? Land-blubber."

"Lubber!" Marigold laughed. "Though I like blubber best! Who next?"

"You mustn't ask too many for the launch," Janet warned her. "Six is quite enough."

"Then you, Anna?"

"I'd love it. I might find time for a quick sketch. We shall have to pull up for tea, or Charlie won't get any."

"Rather!" Marigold looked round the table. Nobody seemed very keen. Except Polly, bulging eyes fixed on the girl. So dull? Still, that horrible beating. "What about you, if your mother can spare you?"

"I can easily." Mrs. Gee's Devonshire cheeks were warm with pleasure. "It 'ud do her good."

"Then we're full up, as Miss Plowden must come. To keep me in order!"

"Thank you, my dear. I should enjoy it, and we've had so many birthdays together."

Mrs. Arkwright sniffed: picking out all those as fancied themselves! It wouldn't be allowed in Russia.

"We must give Mrs. Mappin's room a good turn-out to-morrow," she announced spitefully. "She'll expect it clean when she returns."

"No." Janet had seen through this. "She doesn't want it touched, and it's going to be a general holiday. Except for you, I'm afraid, Amy, your day for helping in the kitchen. Still, we'll have a cold supper, in case we're a little late."

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"A pity the Deaconess can't be with us," Charlie observed.

There was a titter, and Madame Ducroy asked politely: "A dea-con-ess? What is zat?"

Miss Plowden explained, as well as she could.

"A lady *curé*? Zat is new to me. Does she take ze confession?"

"When she can!" Marigold gurgled. "From Amy, who is learning her catechism!"

"For 'er first communion?" Madame Ducroy looked incredulous, then smiled. "As you say, bettaire nevaire zan late!"

Even Rachel laughed at this, and agreed later on how well she took the correction. French, but not so bad as they'd feared; and could be kept under, Amy decided, when Dr. Janet was out of the way.

## CHAPTER V

THE birthday dawned, as fine as anyone could wish; indeed, the beginning of a heat wave. There were home-made presents, and a book of poems from Miss Plowden, with a white suede belt as Janet's gift. She had been commissioned by Charlie to buy a new violet ribbon, Anna's suggestion, a happy one, for Madame Ducroy produced a bunch of violets that not only looked real but were scented. She pinned this to Marigold's new cotton frock, in green and white stripes, the belt to complete it and hide Rachel's uneven waistband.

"So! You are charming, a vision of Spring!"

At last the looked-for hour arrived, and the party embarked on the calm water. Marigold knew a thrill as they rounded the jetty. Now she would see the Promised Land.

After settling her guests, she stood by Charlie, watching the coast draw near, with its inn and huddle of white cottages, then the long line of beach, broken by turf and rocks. Beyond the headland she had her first sight of the open sea, and knew a sense of freedom that reminded her of the birdman. Where was he now, playing tricks in the

air? The breeze of their passage caught her hat and she pulled it off, to hear Janet's voice:

"No, darling. The sun's too strong. You'll get a headache."

"Here!" said Charlie, diving into a pocket. "Tie it on."

With a string Marigold achieved a poke bonnet, heedless of the effect.

"How pretty she is!" Anna murmured to Janet, perched on the cabin roof. She gazed into the distance. "There's an island!"

Charlie had seen it and altered their course. Slowing down as they approached the shore she was prepared for the girl's excitement.

"Look! I thought they were stones on that hill, but they're sheep—aren't they? There's one with a pair of curly horns!"

"That's a ram," said Polly.

"And we're coming to a farm. People, too!"

A woman emerged from the low doorway with a bucket of swill, and emptied it into the pig's trough. Shielding her eyes from the glare, she gazed at the launch. A child toddled out and clutched her skirt, followed by a younger woman, a baby in her arms. Marigold gazed wistfully at the family group. If only there were children at Rual! But presently, a stranger sight caught her attention. The low land was giving place to hills purple with heather. On the highest point of the ridge against the blue sky was a great, shaggy beast with horns arching up to their dangerous tips, the sentinel of the herd, hidden from sight in the glen beyond. Menacing, he seemed to command heaven and earth.

"That's a bull," said Polly.

Anna smiled at Janet.

"I've never heard her so chatty! It was sweet of Marigold to bring her. When are we going to have tea?"

"In other words, find a place to sketch?" Janet laughed. "Not yet, I think. She's enjoying herself."

On and on they went, circling back to the mainland, where they crossed a bay, and found a narrow inlet beyond the point.

"Oh, do let's go up there!" Marigold cried.

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"Okay!" Charlie brought the launch round, keeping an eye out for hidden rocks, but the opening was clear. "Nice and shady. Good place for tea."

Woods veiled the slope on their right, and between the tall trees they could see the soft green of bracken. Suddenly, they came to a clearing, with a turreted house standing back, and a stream of tawny water that emptied itself into the loch.

"Looks a nice place," Miss Plowden murmured. "Do you know who lives there?" she asked Janet.

"I'm afraid I don't. We've never come so far."

The forest began again. Presently, the governess approached Charlie and whispered in her ear.

"Righto! There might be."

The trees were beginning to thin. She steered nearer to the shore where a green ride opened up, with a distant vista of blue hills, then cut off the engine.

"Watch now," Miss Plowden warned Marigold as they drifted past. "There they are!"

An antlered head rose from the bracken. The stag sniffed the air, and trotted off, two does in his wake.

"What are they?" Marigold gasped. "Deer?"

"Yes. I hoped there'd be more."

"It was wonderful." The girl sighed. "They moved like a ripple of silk! Did you see them, Charlie?"

"Rather!" She grinned. "Plenty in Richmond Park. We'll be going aground!" She restarted the engine. "Tide's on the turn."

The next diversion came from Anna, with another clear patch, where a cottage with a sagging roof stood in a garden bright with hollyhocks.

"Oh stop!" she cried. "I could paint that! Go back a bit, Charlie, to get in that last fir."

"Yes," Janet pronounced. "We could have tea here."

"All very well," said Charlie, obeying. "But how are we going to tie up? Water's too shallow beneath that bank." She wrestled with the problem. "Two ropes might do it, and then she'd swing out on the tide." She was off, to find a spare one and knot them together. Before they could stop her she had slipped off her slacks and shirt, to reveal a boy's cotton drawers, and drop into the water. After a few strokes she found the bottom. "Pitch me the rope!" she called back.

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Marigold threw the coiled end, and watched her paddle ashore. Soon it was round the bole of a tree.

"That do?" she asked Anna, already in the stern.

"Yes. Just what I wanted! Or will be when she comes round. Will she stay?"

"I think so, when she gets as far as she can. The tide's coming in fast."

Back came Charlie, to scramble aboard. She was standing in the bows, nude save for the sagging drawers, when an elderly man emerged from the trees. He glowered at the intruders, and picked out Miss Plowden, raising his angry voice.

"Are you aware that this is private prop—" He stopped, his eyes on Charlie, whom he had taken for a boy. Now he saw his mistake; saw too, the painful blush on the cheek nearest him, or so he believed it to be. With a muffled sound that might have been an oath or an apology, he wheeled round and dived into the wood.

Stricken dumb, they watched his kilt vanish. Then Marigold began to giggle.

"It was you, Charlie?"

"Can't help it. Silly old gowk!"

"For goodness sake get dressed," Janet told her, and looked at Miss Plowden, who was struggling between decorum and a sense of humour. The latter prevailed.

"May we take that for the laird's permission to stay?"

"Well, one thing's certain, he won't come back!" Janet laughed. But what would Sybil have thought of it? "Let's risk it?"

Anna, convulsed, as Charlie in her slacks reappeared to hang out the wet drawers, chimed in:

"Really, Charlotte! I'm surprised at you."

The Deaconess's precise accents set the final seal on their mirth, and they settled down to unpack the hamper. With a sly glance at Janet Polly said:

"Charlie went ashore."

Janet looked blank, but quickly recovered.

"Why not? She often has to at Muss." Her voice sharpened. "Hand me the thermos."

Polly subsided, and the feast began, in the green shade, the sun dipping behind the hills. Never had Marigold been so happy. Her party, her guests! Miss Plowden watched her lovingly, noting the familiar gesture when the last

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scone spread with Devonshire cream had vanished, for the girl's fingers went to the violet bows and the safety pins that secured them.

"We needn't go back yet, need we, Aunt Janet?" she begged. "Give Anna a chance." Dipping her brush into the mug drained of tea, and refilled from her water-bottle, the worn paint-box on her knee. "She's in her glory!"

"Well, a little longer, but we'd better pack up. We mustn't be too late. I'm thinking of Madame Ducroy."

"She's having tea with ma," Polly volunteered. "Her grandpa had a farm and she wants to see ours."

How clever of her, Miss Plowden thought.

"Then that's all right," Janet agreed willingly.

They lazed, Marigold dipping into the volume of Shelley, which she had brought with her.

"Read us something," the governess suggested. "Whatever you like."

She watched the girl turn the pages, thinking she would choose the shortest, but she looked up, and suggested, *The Cloud*.

When Miss Plowden nodded she began the lines in her clear, youthful voice, a little uncertainly at first, until carried away she came to:

That orbéd maiden with white fire laden,  
Whom mortals call the moon,  
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,  
By the midnight breezes strewn;  
And wherever the beat of her unseen feet,  
Which only the angels hear,  
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof  
The stars peep behind her and peer.

Nothing could stop her now, and on she went triumphantly to the end.

With a sigh she emerged from her dream.

"Do you think poetry was made before music? I do."

"With Shelley they are one," said Miss Plowden softly.

"He makes you feel so *free*!" Marigold closed the book, and clasped her knees with her arms. "I'd love to go to Italy and see the beach where his body was burnt."



Air, water, and fire. To think that if he hadn't been drowned he might have written more!"

"But possibly, not-so well. That's some consolation."

"Yes, though I can't believe it." Marigold looked at Polly, staring up at her with an absent expression. "Did you like it?"

"Me? I weren't listening."

At that moment they heard the bark of a dog, and Anna turned her head, to warn them:

"There's a man coming round the cottage. I'm afraid he's seen us!"

Striding along the bank, a short, thick-set, gillie appeared, and proceeded to order them off, whilst the collie barked furiously, and leaped up and down. To their amazement, Polly took up the challenge:

"You be quiet!" she shouted. "Or else I'll tell on you. Thinking yerself as good as yer master that let us bide here!" Catching Janet's whispered: "We must go!" she took advantage of the man's momentary discomfiture. "But we won't be under no compliment! You can untie that rope."

Grumbling, he did so, coiled the loose end and flung it at Charlie, who had started up and narrowly caught it. They heard him denounce women in trousers, and Charlie's retort, "Men who can't throw!" To restore the tone of the party, Janet called:

"Thank you. Good evening!"

There was no response, though he cuffed the dog and watched the launch turn round.

"Good for you, Polly!" Charlie told her. "Saved me a swim!"

"He reminded me of my dad. Just the way he'd speak to ma. But he couldn't get at us here."

"No, serve him right!" Anna broke out. "I wanted ten minutes more. Still, I think I can do something from this." She held out the water-colour.

"It's charming," said Janet. "The light on the loch, and that old roof. Enjoyed yourself?"

"I have! So good to get away from the island."

She voiced the general opinion, and Marigold asked:

"Why can't we always do this?"

"It wouldn't be a treat, then," Miss Plowden responded wisely. "We're coming to where we saw the deer."

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The girl's attention was diverted, and she missed the look that passed between her elders. Had it been prudent? Janet wondered, but Miss Plowden's face reassured her. Nothing stirred in the bracken, to Marigold's disappointment, and presently she called:

"Here's the house! Or is it a castle? I wish we lived there, and could walk for miles. There's a car!"

All heads turned to see it wheel round to the door. Three men came out with their host, and stood talking. On the still air they could hear one of them laugh, before the trees blotted out the scene. A virile laugh, strangely stirring to women cut off from the world. It was all wrong, Miss Plowden thought, now Marigold was seventeen. Her glance moved on to Polly's sullen face, her mind on her lost fisherman. Why should they be deprived of the chance of marriage by a woman with an unbalanced mind? For her summing-up of Sybil's condition was the same as Michael Chaytor's, in his last conversation with Janet. He had added, "I wish you could cut free, my dear, but I suppose it's no good talking, though it's bound to reflect on your work. The world is changing so fast. Even I, living in London, feel scared at times, and when my play came out peeped through a hole in the curtain to see how the young generation took it. One can't only write for one's own." Unaware of this summing up, Miss Plowden decided that she must find some occupation for her pupil in the holidays. Perhaps Madame Ducroy would teach her singing? The French school inferior to the Italian, still better than none.

On went the launch, the laugh forgotten when they reached the open sea, where the sun in a last blaze of glory was sinking below the horizon, leaving fine streamers of amber and rose. Over their heads the sky was turning to duck's egg green, the twilight at hand.

"Take the quickest way, Charlie," Janet told her. "It's later than I thought."

Avoiding the unknown island, Charlie steered straight for Rual, to Marigold's disappointment. Polly gazed at the distant village, where the fishing-boats were drawn up, mindful of the Sabbath ahead. Women could cook the midday dinner, but no man would bring in wood for the fire, or give his wife a hand. They took their proper place as the lesser creation whilst their husbands kept the Lord's

Day, and rounded it off with a dram. Polly's last hope had fled. Something in her expression made Janet think of Sybil's instructions, and she called to Marigold:

"Did your mother tell you to fasten the outer door when you went to bed?"

"Yes. I shall suffocate! But I promised I would."

"You've had plenty of air to-day," Miss Plowden soothed her. "You'll sleep like a top."

Nevertheless, when they entered the Castle they were met by a hot wave. In the refectory not a breath came through the open windows, and the company at table looked melting, all but Madame Ducroy with her delicately powdered face.

"We started," Amy announced. "I though you'd prefer it, Dr. Janet, as it was so late, and we're rather tired from the heat. What a day!"

"Quite right," Janet responded. "It was lovely on the water." She turned to the Frenchwoman on her right. "I hear you went to the farm?"

"Yes, and see ze milking! I am 'appy, Mrs. Gee so agreeable, and it bring back my child'ood, wiz my *grand-mère* at a farm in Brittany. Always when I 'ave been ill I go zere for ze good food and air."

She went on to describe her holidays until Amy interrupted her:

"You slept in the *kitchen*?"

"It is ze custom, and so comfortable in winter."

Madame Ducroy smiled, fully aware of Amy's impertinence.

"You 'ave not travel, per'aps?"

Charlie came to the rescue:

"You should have gone with me to Boolong, Imy, when I went on a day-trip from Folkestone, seen the *cafés*, with everyone sitting outside, and the saucers with the prices on them. Not bad stuff, French beer, either."

Madame Ducroy smiled at her.

"You 'ave ze good taste, mademoiselle." She turned to Janet. "You enjoy my salad, docteur?"

But Amy hadn't finished her attack.

"She wouldn't put the beetroot in, although I had it ready, or let me slice the lettuce."

Madame Ducroy shuddered.

"In France we *prefaire* it creesp, and we do not mix. But I am sorree if you miss ze red juice." Here Anna

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laughed. "Docteur Jeannette, is it possible to secure some seeds of ze little 'erbs? I talk to Irène, who is amiable and say she will sow zem. Ze sorrel, too, it make a good soup."

"And don't forget garlic," Miss Plowden suggested.

"You 'ave reason! A *gigot*—'ow you say?"

"Leg of mutton," Marigold translated.

"T'ank you. Eet is nodding if not rubbed first wiz garlic. 'Ow nice to find people who travel and 'ave culture." She gave Amy her sweetest smile. "You excuse me? Not all 'as ze chance."

It was evident to the picnic party that Mrs. Arkwright had laid down the law for the new guest once too often. When Janet rose the latter excused herself, a little tired, and if permitted would go to her room. The others decided against the usual Saturday night films, to Charlie's relief. When ten o'clock struck they dispersed. Miss Plowden saw Marigold to her room and found the outer door wide open.

"You must close this now, my dear." She stood for a moment, gazing out. "How bright the moon is! And not a cloud in the sky." She closed the door, locked it, and kissed her pupil. "Now you must have a good sleep."

Easy to say, but in the tower room with its deep, narrow windows the girl tossed and turned, finding the heat unbearable. At last she dragged off her nightdress and lay bare on the sheet. Far away she heard the putter of the motor-boat; some man joining the fishing fleet, she decided, forgetting it was Saturday, and envied him in the open air. It would be cooler down at the pool, and suddenly, she thought of the hammock, and sat up in bed, to throw back her heavy plaits. Why not? She had only promised her mother to lock the door, and she could do it from outside. Polly couldn't slip in then! Delicious to lie there, wake early and bathe whilst the water was cool. Out she got, found her canvas shoes and a faded blue kimono, quite enough without her damp nightdress. As an afterthought she scribbled on a piece of paper: "Gone down to swim." In case she overslept, and Miss Plowden came to look for her. But she wouldn't, for the birds would rouse her, the cry of the kittiwakes.

The firs smelt strongly of resin melted by the sun, and at the door in the wall to the vegetable garden she paused

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to break off a sprig of lad's love, which had planted itself outside, then ran down the slope. There was the sea! The moon shone on the break in the cliffs, with its tumbled rocks, and the dried grassy bank by the swimming pool. On the farther side under the trees was deep shadow, but between the two nearest ones it was lighter, and there hung the hammock that Janet had brought back for Sybil on a long-past visit to town, a wide affair, with a head-rest. Marigold climbed in and kicked off her shoes. What luxury! She could breathe here, and she threw back the folds of her kimono to feel the air on her neck and shoulders.

The hammock swung gently under her; almost like flying, she thought, with a brief vision of the birdman, her last impression before sleep claimed her.

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER VI

PIERS HARRINGTON CHOMELEY tied the motor-boat to the sole remaining post above the little beach on the Ram. Looking across the islet he could see a tower of the Castle, with no light, but there might be watchful eyes and he wished the moon were not so full. Stripping off his flannels, he surveyed his navy swim-suit and grinned. Very chaste and inconspicuous, a help to win his bet with Tiny. 'He glanced at his wrist-watch, before he hid it under his clothes. A quarter to eleven? The old hens should be going to bed. Dropping into the water, he made for Rual.

He had taken his bearings from the plane, and detected the weak spot where the trees ended, and the cliff recommenced. An arm flashing over his head, his mind reverted to a talk with a red-haired woman, who was spending a night at the village inn. What was the owner's name? The terraces at the Zoo? Mappin! Go up one, Mr. Pelman!

It was farther than he had imagined, but here were the rocks jutting out and others submerged, a danger to boats, but not to a careful swimmer. Using the last as stepping-stones he reached the barrier cutting off the swimming pool, climbed it and looked over cautiously, to discover a low building, missed in his earlier survey. Nothing stirred. He dropped down to the path and saw it was a bathing-shed, two sections divided by a verandah. Here something white caught his eye. Just what he wanted! He picked up the bath-towel laid on the rail to dry, mounted the two steps, and rubbed his bare limbs and head; then peeping into the dressing-room he saw a looking-glass, and on the shelf below a comb. He was fussy about his hair, and now he completed his toilette. Stepping back to admire himself something sharp pricked his heel. A pity they didn't provide shoes! He almost laughed aloud when a ray of moonlight from the end window disclosed a pair of sandals, on the large size. They reminded him of a drawing

in an old *Punch* where a modest damsel in a skirted bathing-dress stood on the steps of a horse-drawn machine. He tried them on; a little tight, and he loosened the criss-cross, red braids, tying the ends round his ankles. The merry Swiss boy! Useful, though, if he had to bolt from a pack of infuriated females.

Following the path, he glanced up the slope that must lead to the Castle. Should he risk that first, or go to the cliff where he had seen his golden girl? The thought of her, unknown to Tiny, had added zest to the wager. He stopped dead, his eyes on a hammock swinging from the last trees. Gosh! There she was, a thick plait of hair escaping over the edge. His luck was in. Noiselessly, he approached her.

Asleep, the silky lashes on her cheek under the full white lids, her kimono open and one little breast exposed, pink-tipped like a bud of almond blossom. The mischief died out of his face, for never before had he seen such a vision of childish innocence. Rouse her with a kiss? But she mustn't wake like this and find him here! Holding his breath, he drew a fold of the blue cotton across her. Light as his touch had been she stirred, and he was looking into her eyes. Still held by her dream she whispered:

"The birdman?"

"Yes." He smiled at the name. "You waved, and I've come!"

At the sound of his crisp voice she awoke fully, and started up, filled with fear. Not of him, but the Rule.

"Go away!" she cried imperiously. "No man is allowed on the island!"

"Quite." His blue eyes were wicked. "But I'm here!"

And had even been in the swimming pool? What cheek! For the first time Marigold knew the excitement of matching her wits with a man's. It was no good ordering him off. There was a better way.

"Do you know what would happen if we were caught? I should be beaten!"

"You?" He could not believe his ears. "By whom?" he asked fiercely.

"All of them! They stand in a line and cut at you with a cane as you pass. It was done a week ago to Polly, who went down at night to meet a fisherman on

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the jetty." She surveyed him triumphantly. "So you see!"

"It's mediæval," he muttered, and glanced sideways. "Let's get among those trees? We can see anyone coming, but they can't see us."

Marigold hesitated. She simply must know if he were the boy on the beach.

"All right," she conceded, and felt for her shoes. "But not for long." Swinging her legs over, to her surprise she was lifted down, in arms that were gentle but hard as steel. "Oh! Thanks."

He released her at once, and bending, picked up a green sprig that had fallen out of her sash, from which a spicy odour rose.

"What's this?"

"Lad's love," she said impatiently.

"Mine? You'd better keep it, hadn't you?"

"It's dead!" She discarded the offering. "Do come along! It will be safer in the wood."

Some girls would have thought otherwise, crossed his mind as they plunged into the shadows.

"This is far enough." He halted under a pine. "You can sit here and lean against the trunk. What's behind us?" he asked, as she settled herself on the soft ground.

"Only the warren. Nobody goes there, except the rabbits!"

He dropped down beside her, with a clear view of the upper path, and turned his head quickly, for she was giggling, pointing to his feet.

"What is it?"

"Cousin Selina's sandals! How priceless!" Her golden-brown eyes sparkled with mischief. "She can't swim, so she walks on the bottom, and dips! Three times, to keep off sunstroke, she says! Is that what you did?"

"No," he laughed back. "I swam from that little island"—he made a vague gesture—"over there."

"From the Ram? Why?"

"I wanted to see you again." He wasn't going to mention the bet. "You looked such a dream on the cliff."

"Was that all?" she asked, disappointed. "I thought you might have remembered me?"

His glance ran swiftly over her, and lingered on the curve of her throat.



"I'll swear we've never met before!"

"Sure?" Hope was fading, and with it the excuse for prolonging the exciting adventure. "Haven't you ever been to Worthing?"

"Only as a kid. I had measles, rather badly, at school, and when I was out of quarantine my people sent me to the sea. To an old cousin who used to say, 'Go and play on the beach.' By myself! So cheery?"

"But you did play!" she cried, enchanted. "You built sand castles with me!"

He stared at her, and suddenly, his face lit up.

"Good Lord! You're Goldie—I remember your hair." He sidled closer. "Isn't that wizard? Old sweethearts! So now we can start where we left off."

"Where you left off," she corrected. "Vanished without a word!"

"I couldn't help that. My father had a bad accident, and I was wired for. A long way to Lincolnshire, and I only just caught the train." His face was serious now, and he looked older. "I couldn't even send you a post-card, as I didn't know your name. I don't yet," he prompted.

"Marigold Mappin."

"Then your mother owns the Castle?" He wasn't sure he liked that. "And you're the sleeping princess?" His voice grew tender. "When I saw you in the hammock I wanted to kiss you awake. Would you have minded, Goldie?"

She was utterly at a loss. How did one reply to a question like that?

"I don't know," she said desperately. "You're the first man I've spoken to since we came here. Eleven years ago."

"Gosh!" No wonder she looked innocent. "Then you're eighteen," he miscalculated.

"Not quite." In the gloom of the trees she smiled to herself. "And you?"

"Twenty-two. How did you recognise me?"

"By your eyes when you waved. At least, I wasn't sure, but there was something familiar about them. I was hoping I'd see you again. But I'd get into frightful trouble if this were known."

"We'll keep it dark. That's half the fun!" He was thinking back. "You had a birthday at Worthing, and

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I promised to buy you a pink mug. It rather worried me afterwards. Poor little kid, done out of a present!" His hand covered hers on her lap. "Let's go to Muss to-morrow and I'll find you something?" He saw her amazement, and went on, "There must be some spot where a boat can pull in, and you could slip away quietly."

"There isn't—and I couldn't, possibly!" She was scared. "They'd be looking for me everywhere, Charlie in the launch——"

"Who is Charlie?" he interrupted. "I thought there wasn't a man on the island?"

"She's our electrician, her real name Charlotte." Very still under his touch she ignored it, and continued earnestly, "You mustn't try it. You'd be caught! *Please*—I don't remember your name?"

"Piers. Piers Chomeley, commonly known as 'Chump'!" He smiled into her grave face. "I think you used to call me 'Boy'."

"So I did! I like Piers better, though. Piers Plowman?"

"No, birdman," he laughed. "That's how you greeted me in the hammock—when I *didn't* kiss you! I deserve a reward for that." He was stroking the slim fingers under his. "But look here, darling, if we can't meet in the day-time I'll go to Muss alone and bring you something to-morrow night."

"On Sunday?" A score, and she giggled. "Besides, you might vanish again—oh, I forgot!" What a silly thing to say! "Did your f-father——" she faltered, and stopped.

"Recover? He lived for five years. On his back, an injury to the spine."

"How dreadful!" She knew what to do with her hand now, and turning it clasped his. "I'm so sorry, Piers. I hope he didn't suffer?"

"A good bit, poor old chap, but I never once heard him complain. And he'd been a sportsman, rode to hounds and a good shot. The worst of it was we had to clear out of the Rectory for the next man, and he loved every inch of it. I don't know why I'm telling you this. Except that you're such a little love!"

A shiver ran over him, and she exclaimed:

"You're cold!"

"Not a bit, dry as a bone. Such a warm night that my visiting costume is sufficient!" Though not what he would

have chosen for courting. "One minute!" Releasing her hand he leaned forward and loosened the braids round his ankles. "A bit tight," he explained, and drew up his knees, then felt for her fingers again. "Your hair's much longer. Why do you tie it with tape?"

"Only at night, to save my ribbons." She began to tell him of her treasures, delighted when he said:

"Then that's what I'll bring you from Muss. On Monday evening." He saw a change in her smiling expression. "What's wrong with that?"

"You're not coming to-morrow, then?" she asked ingenuously.

"Of course I am!" He had meant to stay one night at the inn to win the bet, but now all his plans were altered. "Don't you ever go off the island?"

"I did to-day, for the first time. It was so exciting! We had a picnic on the launch and went ever so far, saw Highland cattle, and deer in a forest, things I'd only read about." With shining eyes, she poured it all out, even to Charlie's adventure with the laird, at which he chuckled. "The most wonderful day I've ever had, and then finding you! How did you get to the Ram?"

"On a boat with an out-board motor, from the village across the loch."

"I heard it! I thought it was someone going to the fishing fleet late. I say, you mustn't tell them at the inn that you came here. It would go all round, and Aunt Janet might learn of it! You will be careful?" she urged.

"Rather! I said it was to visit a man up the coast and I might be late, so they gave me a key. Don't you worry, my sweet. Who is Aunt Janet?"

She told him, and went on to speak of her governess and Anna.

"Then you have some good friends?"

"Yes, but no one young, except Polly. She's twenty-six and half daft!" Her face became wistful. "You don't know how lovely it is to talk to someone young! And a man—that's queer! Mother says that all men are bad."

"What tosh! Just as many good ones as women. More, I suspect!" A horrid doubt seized him. "This isn't a convent, is it?"

Her laugh rang out, for she had forgotten prudence.

"No! Though we've a Deaconess, Cousin Selina, of ye

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sandals! Always preaching at me because I haven't been confirmed, and pointing out my sins! I can't stand her, or her parasite, as Anna calls her, Amy Arkwright. A Communist, who's turned religious and is learning her catechism, at forty! So I've plenty of time, though I must choose my religion first."

"Choose it?" he echoed, puzzled.

"Yes. Mother believes you must be grown up before you decide. So theology's not in my lessons, though Miss Plowden thinks it should be. I listened once to Cousin Selina—she holds a service on Sundays—but I couldn't make head or tail of it! Are you a Christian?" she asked, and wondered why he looked uncomfortable.

"I'm Church of England, if that's what you mean. My father had the family living, and so he, er——" He broke off, and started again. "Do you mean to say you've not been taught anything about it? I thought all children were made to say their prayers."

"I wasn't. Do you think it's a good thing?"

Her face was so serious that he checked a ribald reply.

"Well, I do. A girl should have a spot of religion. Helps her along occasionally. A man too, if it comes to that." He saw she was not satisfied, and with an effort brought out, "Anyhow, believe in, er—God."

"Which one? There are three, aren't there? Cousin Selina prays to the lot." Marigold drew her hand away to brush back a tendril of hair that had strayed on to her flushed cheek. "Then when I asked her she said they were one! And Madame Ducroy has a figure of a woman with a blue shawl over her head, and she prays to that. It's all so confusing! I think when mother returns I must ask her if I can have a Bible, and read it up."

"Good idea!" This was not at all the line of conversation he had intended, yet he felt a curious pity. Her mother must be off her head! Keeping this lovely child shut up on the island among a pack of old women, and telling her that all men were bad! How Tiny would laugh if he could hear them! "Your mother's away, then?" he asked.

"She's gone to Grannie, who is ill. A jolly good thing, or I shouldn't be here." She told him of the empty suite with the hot tower room, and how she had suddenly thought of the hammock. "Fancy if I'd missed you!"

"Would you have minded?"

"Frightfully! I was sure it was you in the plane, though I never dreamed you'd come and look for me."

"Had to!" He was studying her golden head against the dark bole, the pale glimmer in the shadows, and the curve of her lips. "That tree looks rather hard? Let's get comfy—like this." He slipped a bare arm behind her. "Isn't that better?"

"Much! But what about you?"

"I'm all right." For how long, he wondered, debarred from any more ardent caress by her serene unconsciousness. So he thought, but she was feeling rather strange; the deep voice seemed to trickle down her spine, not at all the same as when Charlie would fling an arm carelessly round her. To break the dangerous silence he asked, "Where did you live before you came here?" And listened, as much to her warm voice as to the words. "A doctor? And your Grannie lives at the Hall?"

"With my grandfather, and Uncle Bernard, when he's home. He's in the Coldstream Guards. He thinks there will be a war, so he didn't want mother to put off her visit."

"Thinks? It's a dead cert, I'm glad to say."

"Glad?" Marigold stared at him. "You may have to fight?"

"That's what we're for." Piers grinned. "Not only for ornament!" And enjoyed her little giggle.

"What do you do at the aerodrome?" she asked, thinking how white his teeth were against his bronzed skin.

"I've been with an O.T.U., but that's over, and now I'm posted to Ledgard for Ops."

"Means nothing to me," she confessed. "You see we never get airmen here."

"You would if they saw you! I'll translate: Operational Training Unit, sort of flying school, and I was an instructor. Now I'm on leave, extended, a bit of luck, but they don't want me in Dorset until the nineteenth. I had a wire yesterday. Also, one from my married sister to say her youngest boy was down with mumps, bless him, as I didn't really want to stay there. So I came to look for you, my sweet." His arm tightened and he felt Marigold stir, but did not divine her restlessness, only his own, and the softness of her young body. This wouldn't do! "The moon's going down," he said abruptly. "I must be off soon."

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"Yes, the rocks are dangerous, so do be careful." To her relief he released her, and rose. "What a pity," she sighed. "It's gone so quickly!"

"I'll be back to-morrow night, and you must have some sleep." He drew her on to her feet. "I don't want to go. Isn't there room for two in the hammock?"

"Afraid not," she laughed. "But they go to bed early on Sundays, so I'll be here about half-past ten. If I'm late you'd better hide in the wood." Emerging from the trees she looked up at the sky, starry now, and deeply blue. "Don't you wish you were up there?"

"Not at the moment."

"But it must be heavenly, flying. To feel so free! You must tell me all about it." She added, rather wistfully, "I'll come and see you off."

"No, I'm going to tuck you up."

Arrived at the hammock, he forestalled her movement and lifted her in.

"You *are* strong," she said admiringly. "Oh, my shoes!"

"I'll do it." He drew them off the slender feet, then pulling down her kimono snugly, arranged the golden plaits on either side of her childish face. "Now shut your eyes. I want to see you as the Sleeping Beauty again."

Trustfully, she obeyed him. He stood, sorely tempted, looking down at the fresh lips. They parted, and he held his breath. What was she going to say?"

"Don't forget Cousin Selina's sandals."

Was she acting? No!

"I'll remember," he told her. "Good night, Goldie. Happy dreams!"

Feeling virtuous, he turned away. At once her eyes opened wide, and propped on an arm she watched him stride down the path, the poise of his dark head, the narrow hips and flat shoulder-blades that in the coming war would distinguish his race from another that slouched and was broad in the beam. He was lovely, she decided, like one of the Knights of the Round Table. A queer thought crossed her mind: had Polly felt like this with her fisherman?

There he was, barefooted, emerging from the bathing-shed. At the rocks he halted and looked back. Up went her arm and waved wildly, to see the same gesture, then catch her breath. The birdman had saluted her!

The end of a perfect day. She was feeling drowsy now he was gone, but she waited until she heard the putter of the motor-boat. Safe! She let herself drift into a sleep too deep for dreams. . . .

When she awoke the sun was high in the heavens and she couldn't think where she was. Then memories came crowding back, with the need for caution. That note left behind. Was it late? She had better be found in the water. Pulling on her shoes, she hurried to the bathing-shed. Here she wound up her plaits. Bother! No hair-pins. She managed to tuck her hair away beneath her white rubber cap and clip it under the chin. As she rose from her dive she heard a voice hailing her:

"Hello! You've beaten me to it this time!" It was Charlie, swinging along in her slacks. "Shan't be long!"

And suddenly, Marigold remembered it was Sunday, when breakfast was at nine. They played about in the pool, Marigold thinking of the locked tower door, difficult to explain. She must get rid of her friend at the garden gate. Better still, make an excuse and go up first.

"I've been in long enough," she announced, and climbed out.

"Okay! What are you going to do this morning?" Charlie called after her. "Have some tennis?"

"No." A brilliant idea dawned. "I'm going to wash my head." For she wanted to be alone. "A good day to dry it?"

"Yes. Shall I come and give it a rub?"

"Don't you worry! I shall sit in the sun. See you at breakfast!" Marigold cried, and escaped.

Passing the bush of lad's love, she broke off another sprig. She had seen Piers surreptitiously tuck the first one down the front of his suit, had smelt it, too, when his arm came round her. Was that wrong? Mother would say so, but then, she was old, and hated men. She wouldn't understand that it made one feel safe, in the growing darkness and the queer shadows that filled the wood.

Reaching the tower she found the key under the mat and opened the door. There was her note on the dressing-table, so no one had been in. As she took off her kimono she saw a rent in it. Must mend it before the night. Standing on a chair to reach a top drawer in the tallboy where she kept reels of coloured cotton, she found it had

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stuck. With a wrench that overbalanced her she pulled the drawer out and jumped to the floor, upsetting the contents. Clumsy! Looking up, the blue cotton reel in her hand, she saw that part of the side had come away, a strip of wood that fitted into a groove. Had she broken it? Mother *would* be cross! She got on to the chair again and gingerly pulled the strip. Out it came, with a narrow box behind it. A secret drawer! There was something rattling in it, a coin! The Pirate's Treasure? No, of course not—how silly! Still, what a perfect place to hide things; the ribbon Piers had promised her, for she couldn't wear a new one in the day-time, to be spied upon and questioned. Ruth would be sure to spot it. This place was a prison! If only she could escape—light broke through the cloud—be "kidsnatched" by Piers! Madame Ducroy had been right; she had said some man would find her. But Piers didn't want her. He was only the boy on the beach, glad to see his old playmate.

Marigold examined the coin. It was of thin gold, she discovered, a half-defaced king's head on one side, and a heart-shaped design on the other. Very old—would Piers like it? To bring him luck. What a happy find! Replacing it in the secret drawer she got down and started to dress.

At breakfast she looked round the table at the middle-aged faces, and thought how startled they would be if they knew. Except, perhaps, Madame Ducroy. She seemed to have lost her high spirits, and presently, excused her silence to Janet as the result of a "white night."

"What's that?" Ruth, listening, asked.

"A night when you do not sleep, *ma petite*."

"It was very hot," said Janet. "When I first came I tried sleeping outside, but the early light woke me, so I gave it up. You haven't seen my cottage, Madame Ducroy. Would you care to come to tea this afternoon? Or perhaps, you would prefer coffee?"

"You are most amiable, *docteur*. It would give me pleasure. At fif' o'clock, *alors*?"

Janet assented, and rose, the sign for a general dispersal. In the hall Madame Ducroy approached Marigold.

"I 'ave a favour to ask, *chérie*. A rose, to put before ze portrait of my leetle son. To-day is ze anniversaire of 'is death. If you can spare it?"



"Of course! How sad for you," the girl responded shyly. "I'll go and cut it at once, and bring it up to your room. Shall I?"

"Please, but do not tell ze rest." Madame Ducroy smiled lovingly. "To you alone I confide myself."

Marigold found the scissors and went out, to choose three little buds in the flower-border. Small for a baby, she thought, and arranged them in a vase, then mounted the stairs. Madame Ducroy opened the door when she tapped.

"Ow queek you are! And zose are charming, so well-chosen." She put the offering before a framed photograph on her dressing-table. "See, 'e smile!"

"Oh, what a sweet baby!" Marigold bent down to examine the likeness. "The little chubby legs, and his hands, so tiny! How old was he when this was taken?"

"A year. Zen—it is 'is teeth—'e 'ave ze convulsions. I give 'im a 'ot bath, do all I can, but of no avail, alas!"

"Poor Madame Ducroy!" Marigold put an arm round her and kissed the pale face. "I am so terribly sorry."

"You must call me Solange, zat is my name." She embraced the girl on both cheeks. "You do me good, but I must not be foolish." Blowing her nose, she peered into the glass. The darkened lashes had left a smudge where a tear had rolled down, and out came her vanity case. "I must repair myself. But first, I make you a leetle gift!" Bending, she drew out the bottom drawer and lifted a *négligée* in a delicate tone of apricot. "Ze colour ees not for me, but you it will suit." She held it up against the girl. "See 'ow it values your 'air!"

"But I couldn't accept it!" Marigold gasped. "It's silk!"

"Onlee *crêpe de Chine*." Madame Ducroy fingered the stuff. "And not a good weight, but ze effect is all." She laid the garment over the girl's arms. "So say no more, as it pleases me. And now I weesh to be to myself."

Breathing incoherent thanks, Marigold fled. What would Piers think of this? The moment she reached her room she tore off the cotton dress and slipped on the other, with its collar of *broderie anglaise*, the elbow sleeves turned back with the same, then fastened the narrow belt. She was standing before the glass in ecstasy when she heard a step. There was Miss Plowden at the open door.

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"Come and look!" Marigold cried. "A present from Madame Ducroy! Isn't it a dream?"

"Very pretty." Miss Plowden hesitated. "But I don't know what your mother will say. Accepting a gift like that." Which was not precisely what she meant.

"She made me! Put it into my arms and told me to go." The old rebellion stirred. "Why shouldn't I have something pretty? I'm seventeen, and Grannie was married at that age!"

"A different generation." The governess hated to damp the girl's pleasure. "But I see the difficulty. You can't wear it here, but you might have offended Madame Ducroy. Most generous of her."

"Yes, and she asked me to call her 'Solange.' She's in such trouble. You mustn't tell the others, but——" She let Miss Plowden into the secret, knowing she was safe. "You never saw such a sweet baby! I wish he were mine."

"You'll have to find a husband first," Miss Plowden said, amused, then her face became grave. "Poor soul! Hard to lose her only child. I'm glad you were kind to her. Now take that off and be sensible. I looked in to say it's scorching outside, much too hot for tennis, so you'd better find a book and read in the shade."

"I thought of washing my hair, after I've dusted mother's room."

"A good idea. But don't dry it in the full sun, or you'll get a headache. Did you swim this morning?"

"Yes, with Charlie." Marigold, feeling guilty, laid the negligée on the bed. "Isn't this embroidery lovely?"

"Hand-made," Miss Plowden pointed out. "If you were clever with your needle you could copy it. Something to do in the winter months."

With which she departed, her face thoughtful as she closed the door. It was natural for a girl to be fond of dress. Why not get up some theatricals when the wet weather came, and Marigold could wear the gift? Charlie could take a man's part, Dr. Janet too, with her close-cropped hair. They could even do one of Shakespeare's plays.

She did not guess that Marigold was already involved in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*, nor that this was the reason why she looked tired. As the day wore on the girl felt the need of sleep. She must be fresh for Piers to-night.

With Tennyson's poems under her arm she slipped away to the warren, and a favourite trec, warped by the wind, on the cliff beyond it. Here she lay down, and read the *Idylls of the King* until drowsiness overcame her.

An endless day! After supper, to her despair, Amy suggested the "pictures." At last Charlie struck, for it was hot work turning the handle, and they all drifted off to bed. Miss Plowden saw the girl to her room and reminded her to lock the door. Marigold brushed her unruly hair, and tied the plaits with violet ribbons, her ears strained for the putter of the motor-boat. At last she tiptoed into the hall and listened. Not a sound or glimmer of light. Back she went to get out the *négligée*. As a final touch she pinned the scented bunch of violets between her breasts. It was getting late; Piers would be in the wood, waiting.

When she reached it she searched in vain, and returned to the hammock. Here she would lie in her silken robe, like Elaine in the barge. Pretend to be asleep, then open her eyes just in time and laugh at her knight. Lancelot, she decided, Galahad a bit soppy, always looking for the Holy Grail. What was a grail? Miss Plowden had never enlightened her. How sweet the violets were in the still air. That was another grievance. Madame Ducroy used scent, but her mother did not allow it, only *eau-de-Cologne* for a head-ache. Was that the boat? She sat up and listened. No, a bird stirring in the branches. Why didn't he come?

Two hours later, sick at heart, she climbed up the slope and let herself in at the tower door. He wouldn't come now; he had vanished again! Were all birdmen like this? Putting her finery away, she got into bed and buried her face in the pillow. Silly to cry, but she couldn't help it, the disappointment too great. Had he forgotten her, gone off on some other adventure? The pillow was wet and she turned it over with a new resolve: if he came to-morrow she would be on her dignity. But he might not come at all. . . .

## CHAPTER VII

BY the following night, with youth's tendency to run to extremes, Marigold told herself that Piers had already forgotten her—had found her too prim and proper, perhaps? Why hadn't she let him kiss her? She clung to a last hope: he had promised to bring her a ribbon from Muss. Surely, he would keep his word? He had been sorry about the pink mug. But it was no use dressing up for him, and she kept on the turtle-necked jumper and serge skirt, into which she had changed after tennis, for the weather had turned cool, with a cloudy sky. There were moments when she wondered if it had all been a dream, induced by the hammock. It would be cold lying in it to-night, and she caught up a cardigan in the same bottle-green wool, then thought of Piers, shivering in his swim-suit. He might be frozen—die! Her fault. What-ever could she find for him?

In the doorway, the breeze stirring her hair, she had an inspiration: that old coat of mother's, with wide sleeves, double-breasted. And what a size she looked in it! Any-how, he could draw it round him. If he came? Turning back, she slipped through the bathroom to the cupboard where Sybil kept her winter clothes. She was taking the coat off its hanger when a sound reached her ears. It couldn't be—it was! The putter of the motor-boat. Now she wished she had made herself beautiful, but it was too late.

Half-way down the slope the distant vibration ceased. He had reached the Ram! At the hammock she hesitated, for her mood had changed. Piers would need the coat, but she wasn't going to rush into his arms. Let him look for her! Moving on, she chose a dark corner of the verandah and sat down on the bench to wait. It was warmer here, and again, she regretted the knitted jumper, unaware of how it suited her, moulding her youthful body and showing off the fairness of her skin. A golden plait on either shoulder, the full lids veiling her eyes, she subdued her excitement, watching the path. Here he was!

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Mounting the steps, he picked up the towel laid ready for him. Yesterday—she hardened her heart.

"Oh, there you are!" she hailed him casually. "Much cooler this evening, isn't it?"

"Goldie!" He brushed back his hair with his hands and surged forward. "I can't touch you—I'm wet! Those blasted fishermen wouldn't let me have a boat last night! Whatever I offered—the Sabbath Day! And there was I, stuck in that ropey inn wondering what you'd think of me."

"Only that you'd vanished again." But she couldn't keep it up, seeing the trouble in his blue eyes. "It's all right! I've brought you a coat, though I don't know if you can get into it."

"You angel!" He saw she was staring at his chest and smiled. "Admiring my Victorian bosom? It's a sponge-bag, to keep your present dry. That the coat?" He took it from her. "Won't be a minute. Hope I don't split it!"

She watched him turn into the dressing-room. It hadn't been his fault, poor darling! Why hadn't she thought of the local taboo, instead of tormenting herself? Now she must be nice to him. If he split mother's coat it would be difficult to explain, but she didn't care. Not even if she were beaten! It was worth it. Men bad? Piers wasn't, had laughed at the notion.

There he was—looking like a policeman who had forgotten his trousers! Those bare legs below the navy tunic that just covered his knees. He went down to the rail and hung out his wet suit, then returned, to stand and grin at her.

"Like it? I feel like the Russian Ballet! I suppose you haven't a safety-pin?"

"Yes, two!" She took them from behind the bows on her plaits. "If they'll go through the cloth?"

"They'll have to! I don't feel safe." He pinned the skirts together below the last button. "I think that will hold. Now!" He sat down beside her, tore a strip of adhesive tape off the top of the sponge-bag, and emptied it into her lap. "These do?"

"Oh, Piers!" she cried. "I only expected one! Look at this heavenly blue, and the pale green—and what is this?" Narrow ribbon on a card, fit for a doll.

"It's to tie your pigtails at night, will wash, the assistant

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said. "I don't like tape." His voice softened. "Then you can dream of me. Will you?"

"Perhaps—in that coat!" She was so happy that she had to tease him. "But I don't know how to thank you!"

"Quite easy." He bent down to her fair, flushed face. "You'd have kissed me for the pink mug."

"All right!"

A child's kiss, he thought, quick and grateful, unaware of the way her heart was beating under the turtle-necked jumper, disguising her quickened breath.

"That was very nice." And thoroughly unsatisfying, but he meant to go slow. "I like that get-up. It suits you."

"This?" Her eyes opened wide. "I was going to put on something pretty, then it turned cold."

"But that's just right for the wood—and a walk. I want you to show me the island." He sensed her alarm. "It's perfectly safe with these clouds, so long as we keep off the sky-line."

"I could show you the farm from the top of the warren," she said, doubtfully. "But that's all. They might see us from the Castle windows. You really want to?" she pleaded.

"I'll go alone, if you like?"

"No, you won't!" She sprang up. "But do be careful. If we were caught it would spoil everything."

When they reached the trees she led the way. She had given in to him because it might be their last meeting. It probably was! He had said a "few days" at the inn, and this was the third. Whatever would she do without him? They emerged from the shadows, and he saw an upward slope of grass, with sandy patches full of rabbit-holes. The girl mounted the bank and dropped on her hands and knees. Piers stretched himself beside her. In the hollow lay the straggling farm; the yard, sheds and pigsties, with beyond it a paddock and poultry houses.

"Nice place," he whispered in Marigold's ear. "Do you keep cows?"

"Two, but one went across in the barge this morning to a bull on the headland." She had never been taught there were matters one didn't discuss with men. "A good thing, it was dry."

"Quite," he agreed, repressing a chuckle. "Any pigs?"

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"Not many young ones now, but the old sow is expecting a litter. We've heaps of poultry and ducks, so we shan't starve when the war comes." She turned a bright face towards him. "We tried to grow turkeys, but they were a failure. Mrs. Gee says if you sneeze at a turkey it dies!"

"About true. On which side of the house do they sleep?"

"The other one, facing the sea. No, Piers!" For he had risen to his feet. "Remember the Castle windows!"

He looked back.

"The trees are in between. Come on, be a sport! We'll make for that path." As they moved forward he glanced down and added, "So long as you don't ask me to run! Like Joseph from Potiphar's wife."

"What a funny name! Who was Potiphar?"

"A gentleman in the Bible who left his wife about and she took a fancy to another. But he wasn't having any, so he bolted without his clothes! You'd better give me those bows, they're dropping off your plaits, and I'll shove them in my pocket."

"All right." She handed them over. "That's why I put safety-pins behind."

"Joseph's only protection? I say, heather! That's wizard. Let's wait here until that cloud covers the moon." They waited, her hand in his. "Now, my sweet, make for that rock. Like this!"

Crouching, they reached their goal, and dropped down behind it, facing the sea.

"This is fine," Piers breathed. "Just about where I first saw you. Put on that woolly, darling." He helped her into her cardigan, then slipped an arm round her. "Tell me some more about yourself. Do you have lessons still?"

"Yes, though the holidays begin soon. I don't mind, it's something to do, and I love the literature one. Are you fond of poetry, Piers?"

"Some. Rupert Brooke's, for instance." He glanced sideways mischievously. "I suppose you don't read Swinburne?"

"I haven't yet. Do you know Blake?" She could not resist her latest find, and he listened, watching the breeze blow her hair into a mist about her temples. "Isn't that lovely?"

"Yes." Though he meant the coral lips that moved to

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the cadence, and her glowing eyes. "You are 'burning bright,'" he told her. "What shall I bring you to-morrow?"

"You're staying, then?" she whispered, overwhelmed with joy.

"I can't leave you." It was the truth, although he had fought against it all that endless Sunday. "Will you be sorry when I go?"

"I shall break my heart!" The tears rose to her eyes. "Don't let's talk of it!"

His arm tightened, turning her to him, and his lips were on hers, seeking, finding what he sought.

"You know what that means?" he asked huskily as he released her.

"That you love me," she answered simply. Something in his expression warned her. "Isn't that the right thing to say?"

"Whatever you say is right." He stared over the water, moonlit again, for the cloud had passed. "The trouble is what are we to do? I can't run away with you!"

"Why not?"

"You're under age."

"I'm seventeen," she reminded him proudly. "And Grannie was married then."

He was not going to be rushed off his feet.

"I can do nothing without your mother's consent. Besides, you'll be safer here when war comes."

"I don't care about safety! I want to be with you." As he did not answer, his eyes still averted, she went on earnestly, "I could do all sorts of things for you. Mrs. Brown says I'm quite a good cook, and I know all about housework, though I'm not *very* good at sewing. But I'd learn to darn your socks. So why not, Piers?"

"Because it's impossible, darling. I'm not my own master. I may be sent anywhere. To France, perhaps, when war breaks out. They're short of planes."

"But aren't you a Captain?" she asked.

"I'm a Flight Lieutenant." She was so lovely in the moonlight that he broke out, "I wish to God I could carry you off! But it can't be done. Still, we'll write to each other."

"How?" She was in despair. "No letters come to the island. Mother fetches them once a week from Muss, and



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if she saw a man's handwriting she'd open it! As to mine, she takes those too, so I can't send any."

"That's a ropey business." He frowned, his eyes on the sea. "Wouldn't that pal of yours, Charlie, do it?"

"She stays with the launch, never goes up to the post office."

"Damn!" Turning his head, he saw a tear trickle down. "Don't cry, my sweet. We'll find a way." He thought for a moment. "There must be a pillar-box near the harbour?"

"I don't know. I wouldn't like to get Charlie into trouble. Mother might sack her! And she's nowhere to go with a face like hers."

"What's the matter with her face?"

Marigold told him, flicking the tear off her cheek.

"Hard luck! We mustn't risk it. You leave it to me, and we'll have another talk to-morrow. Comfy?"

"Quite." Marigold pulled herself together and felt for her handkerchief. There was something hard in the corner. "Oh, I forgot! I've a present for you! I tied it in this so as not to lose it." She undid the knot and handed him the gold coin. "It's for luck when you're flying!"

"Sweet of you." He examined it. "I say, it's a spade guinea! I don't think you ought to give me this. They're rare, and worth a lot."

"All the better!" She was smiling now. "You like it?"

"I should say I do! I'll always carry it as my mascot. Put it back in your handkerchief, my sweet, and give it to me later for the sponge-bag. Now it's my turn to thank you."

He had kissed a good many girls, but never one like this, so yielding and inexperienced. When he released her she looked up at his face, but no question followed. If there was one thing that put a man off, he thought, it was to be asked possessively about the past. Instead, she murmured:

"What do you do all day at the inn?"

"Get on my motor-bike and explore the country. That's how I first discovered the place. Went in for some beer, and decided it was worth a second visit."

"Are you fond of beer?"

"If it's good. The best drink for a birdman." He

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watched her put the coin away. "If my uncle sees that he'll pinch it! He goes in for old coins. Old history, too, the Saxon period. I'll tell you something funny. The last time I was home we had a man to dinner, a pompous little snob, who had bought a place nearby. He'd been looking at some ancient weapons prized by my uncle, and he committed the deadly sin, spoke of the Saxons as an effete race." Piers chuckled at the memory. "I could see Uncle George getting furious, and when the guest added that his family had come over at the Conquest, presumably to civilise the country, he snorted, 'That Norman rabble? Mercenaries, most of them, and William, who was hard up, paid them with knighthoods and Saxon lands.' I'll never forget the twerp's face! 'Norman rabble'?"

Marigold joined in his laughter.

"Do him good! You can see what the Saxons were in *Ivanhoe*. Besides, there were poets among them. One of them wrote an epic, *The Battle of Maldon*, with a gorgeous line in it." She thought for a moment, then quoted, "'Courage be keener, heart be harder, mood be mightier, as our might faileth.'"

"That's fine." Piers looked at her admiringly. "What a lot you know! You'd get on with my uncle. We're of Saxon stock ourselves, came from Ely originally, and married into Hereward the Wake's family. At least, that's the legend. But Uncle George was ashamed afterwards for speaking to a guest"—he grinned—"a Norman guest, like that. Still, the twerp missed his chance to hit back! He might have pointed out that James I, a shrewd Scot, created baronetcies in just the same way to raise an army for Ireland."

"Yes, I know." Marigold looked puzzled. "But I don't see the point?"

"My uncle is a baronet, the seventh. I'm his heir."

"Then you'll be Sir Piers one day?" she asked, filled with wonder.

"Not for a long time, I hope. I couldn't do without the old boy. I've lived with him since my father died, and had everything I wanted. My mother went off to a sister at Washington, and married again, an American." The hard look had returned to his face. "A bit of a knock, though he's a very decent chap, rolling in money. Now I'm glad, as she'll be off my hands and safe when war

comes. My sister is eight years my senior, married to a man in the Navy, so I'm perfectly free."

Something in the way he said it brought a chill to her heart. A birdman must be free. Silently, she watched another cloud nearing the moon. Piers had his eye on it too, thinking of his bet, which was to go round the island. Semi-darkness succeeded, and he scrambled up, to hold out a hand to the girl.

"Safe now. We'll go and have a look at that cottage. Does anyone live there?"

"Aunt Janet." She was feeling reckless. "But her windows look down the loch, so if we keep on this side she can't see us."

They followed the path worn in the salt and spiky grass, on the edge of the cliff. Turning his head Piers studied the Castle, a vague giant, brooding over the gardens.

"It's a bigger place than I thought. There's a wing."

"No, one side when it was square with a courtyard in the middle, the kitchen quarters now." Marigold started. "What's that?"

"Only a bird. But we won't talk. Voices carry near the water."

Stealthily, they approached the gate with its sentinel fuchsias. Marigold was wondering what Aunt Janet would say if she opened the door and found them. She could not guess that looking up at the sloping roof Piers was thinking: "Nice, snug little place for a honeymoon!" Absurd! He couldn't marry, though he didn't want to lose his golden girl. He frowned, for what would the war bring her? If it lasted more than two years she might have to join up, serve in one of the women's forces. The men would be round her like flies! Scowling, he pointed to the path on their left, and saw her nod.

It branched when they came to the heather.

"Down here," she whispered. "A short cut to the swimming pool."

"I'd rather go round by the higher one."

"You can't! We'd only have to come back."

At this moment a light sprang up in the Castle, and instinctively, he drew the girl down. Lying in the heather they saw a woman's shadow cross the white blind.

"It's all right," Piers whispered. "She can't possibly see us. How nice your hair smells!"

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"Lemon verberna. I washed it on Sunday." With one of her mother's shampoo powders, abstracted from the box. Ought she to confess when mother returned? "There she goes again! It's Madame Ducroy. I expect she can't sleep." She told Piers the reason. "Such a lovely little boy! Isn't it sad?"

"Very." He was caught by a strange new desire, to have a son, part of himself that would endure if in the war death claimed him. By Marigold? She was far too young, and he wasn't going to marry. Anyhow, not yet. His earlier worry recurred, and he asked her, "Where would you go if you had to leave the island? There's a rumour that they may clear the people from the coast."

"I wish they would!" Her voice betrayed her excitement. "I could write to you then, and perhaps get letters. It's the sea that's the trouble!"

"Yes, but don't count on it. Phoney gen, probably! I doubt if the Hun would come so far. Muss isn't an important harbour." Piers glanced at the girl's profile, her chin cupped in her hands as she watched the lighted window, and felt a pulse throb in his throat. He had never been so hard hit. Little Goldie, the child who had saved his pride as he wandered on the sands, to be ignominiously dismissed by a smug young schoolmaster when he threw back a ball to the cricketers. "Only important for ribbons," he resumed, slyly undoing the nearest plait. "Very suspicious people at Muss, especially when I had to ask the length! You never told me."

"I hope the girl didn't guess? Aunt Janet sometimes buys me one."

"That occurred to me, so when I was choosing the colour I said my love had black hair and blue eyes. As a matter of fact there's a barmaid at the *Red Lion* like that. Rather a friend of mine."

"A barmaid?"

It came out so pat that he smiled.

"Why not?" He could not resist teasing her. "We're all after Maggie, but I stand pretty high on the list!" He felt her stiffen, and repented the joke. "Don't be silly! There's only one girl for me, my golden girl. That's what I called you when I spotted you from the plane. Look! That light's gone out."

"And we must go." With a supple movement she was

on her feet, leading the way down the hill. Soon they would come to the boggy ground, but she wasn't going to warn him. Did he make love to every girl he met? In he squelched with a muttered expletive. "Don't fall into the burn, darling," she said sweetly over her shoulder. "You might spoil Cousin Selina's sandals!"

With a wild leap he landed behind her. She should pay for this. Damn these safety-pins! One had given way and he paused to bend it back, as she slipped round the trees supporting the hammock. To stop dead.

"Oh!" she gasped. "There's something moving in the wood! What is it, Piers?"

He followed her panic-stricken gesture. It was true! A low form was creeping towards them. Two points of yellow light gleamed and vanished.

"It's a cat!" he exclaimed. "Were you frightened, darling?"

"Yes! I thought it was Polly, on her hands and knees!" She clung to him. "I shan't sleep down here to-night."

"Shall I stay?" He held her closely, soothing her. "Go back when the dawn breaks?"

"You don't want to!"

"Don't I just!"

"No! If you did you'd take me away in your boat. I can swim to the Ram, I've done it with Charlie." She did not guess his sharp temptation, but when no response came she buried her face in his coat. "You see," she wailed.

It was then he knew that he loved her. This was no passing adventure.

"Look here, sweetheart," he began desperately. "I've got to make you understand. We couldn't get married. I must have permission first. Even if we skipped it the registrar would need three weeks' notice, and my leave will be up in ten days."

At this she raised her head, searching his eyes.

"I'm so afraid you'll vanish again!"

"I promise you I won't. That I'll come back when I can." She was still unhappy, he saw, and his last defence went down. "I'll write to my uncle and tell him we're engaged. We are, aren't we?"

"Yes!" she breathed, and flung her arms round his neck.

## CHAPTER VIII

JANET was anxious for news of Sybil, and Anna went next morning to Muss. Mrs. Brown had confessed to "feeling queer," an excuse for this lapse in the rules, though Janet privately thought it was due to her liver. She smiled when Anna said she and Charlie would start early, as it was going to be hot, and was warned not to be late for dinner. Hurrying through the hall after the gong had ceased Marigold saw her on the stairs with her sketching materials, and called down:

"Where are you off to?"

"Muss, for the letters." Mischievously, Anna added, "Like to come?"

"No," said Miss Plowden firmly, from the refectory door.

"I'm not going to have any more interruptions."

She had expected a plea for mercy, but Marigold laughed.

"I'll be good! Am I late?"

"A little. I was coming to fetch you. How did you sleep?"

"Like a top!" True, for the last part of the night.

There was a fine colour in her cheeks, for she had scrambled through her dressing, and Miss Plowden was satisfied. Later, she thought the girl denser than usual over the hated mathematics, but put the fact down to the heat wave, which had returned. Janet commented on this later on, at dinner, and added the news that it was raining in England. So Mrs. Mappin wrote. She had found her mother a little better, and hoped to return in the middle of the following week.

"When does the Deaconess come back?" Amy asked importantly.

"About the same time, I gather."

Mrs. Gee looked glum, and refused a cheesecake, to Marigold's relief, for she had been counting them. Eventually, she helped Irene to clear the table and wheel the wagons to the kitchen. At the end of the hall where the passage met it she called to Irene, ahead of her:

"I've forgotten my handkerchief!"

And doubled back to her bedroom with the loot. A near

shave! For Miss Plowden had been in the library with the door open. The girl had invited herself to the farm for tea. It would be easy afterwards to slip off to the barn and have a good sleep, hugging her secret. Two secrets! Wouldn't Piers be surprised? She must remember to hunt up those snapshots of herself, taken by Anna. Piers wanted to send the best to his uncle, for he did not regret his impulsive decision, although returning in the boat he had thought it quick work. But there must be some bond between them before he left his little love. After all, he had known her as a child, and when he learnt the name of her mother's family Sir George would be satisfied. He had wanted Piers to marry early, have a son to carry on the old traditions, and could be trusted to keep the engagement a secret.

The day wore on, still and sultry, the sea like glass. There had been a swell last night, and Marigold had begged Piers not to risk the swim if it turned rough. He might get dashed against the rocks! So whilst the others complained of the heat her heart was singing, and she began to plan his costume. He couldn't wear that heavy coat.

When she reached the farm Mrs. Gee greeted her with:

"Come in, my dear, and sit you down. Did I tell you the cat's been out all night? I was wondering if he came to the Castle after Mrs. Brown's Tibby. I hope he didn't scratch at your door?"

"I didn't hear him." Only saw him, Marigold thought, the great, furry beast with his yellow eyes. She watched Mrs. Gee lift the kettle and pour the steaming water on to the tea leaves. "I hope there'll be no more kittens to drown? It seems so unfair."

"You'd be overrun with them if we didn't. But Smut must have some company, and deserves it, such a good mouser." Her comely face lit up with a smile. "He weren't born to be a bachelor! I wish your mother would let me have a dog. There's a mort of rats under the wood stack. Perhaps, the farmer on the headland would lend me one for a bit."

To bark when Piers arrived? Dogs had long ears. Marigold said hastily:

"It wouldn't do. Mother's scared of them, ever since she was badly bitten in the lane behind our old home, has the marks on her legs still!"

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"I've heard of that, a nasty business. Here you are, my dear. There's sugar before you." Mrs. Gee handed Marigold her cup. "And try this cinnamon cake. It was only baked yesterday." She settled down for a gossip. "So Anna went to Muss this morning? That's something new."

"Mrs. Brown wasn't well, and Aunt Janet didn't like to leave her. Besides, why shouldn't Anna?"

"No reason, simply, a little treat for her. But we're none of us getting any younger, and that's the matter with your mother, too set in her ways." She turned her head. "Here's Polly! What have you got there?" she asked.

"Some plover's eggs. Marigold likes them."

"Rather!" the girl exclaimed, as Polly laid five on the table. "Especially against the law!"

"As if they knew everything," Mrs. Gee snorted. "Putting the clocks back and upsetting the cows! You set those eggs on to boil, Polly, then Marigold can take them with her."

"I'll only have two," the girl protested.

"Ma don't like them. Says there's nothing in them, and that's true." Polly went for a saucepan, and called over her shoulder, "You take the lot."

"Do for your supper," Mrs. Gee announced. "But don't you go handing them round."

"That's awkward." Marigold's eyes were veiled. "I could have them in my room last thing. I often feel hungry then!"

"Of course you do, a growing girl," the farmer said indulgently. "You'd best butter a couple of scones to eat with them, and I'll put them in a damp cloth. I'll fetch it now before I forget."

"You're a dear," Marigold called after her. "Can I have a little salt in a twist of paper?"

"To put on the plover's tail!" Polly giggled, her mouth full of cake, and choked.

"You behave yourself," said Mrs. Gee, smiling, and returned to the table.

"I'm surprised at you, Polyanthus!" Marigold said solemnly, and they rocked with mirth. "I wish the Deaconess weren't coming back. Always preaching at me!" This revived a memory. "Mrs. Gee, when you were a child were you taught to say prayers?"



"Of course I were, at my mother's knee." The good soul looked indignant. "And Polly too."

"I wasn't." Marigold saw a swift glance pass between the pair. "I'm going to ask mother if she will let me have scripture lessons next term."

"I would," said Mrs. Gee. "I don't favour these new ideas. It's what you know as a child that rises up in times of trouble." She saw Marigold suppress a yawn. "You're tired, my dear; it's the heat. Why, here's Smut!" The cat was rubbing against her knee. "Had your fun and come back for your food? Just like a man!" Filling her saucer she laid it down on the tiled floor. "There!" Then glanced at the clock. "I'll finish my cup, and then I must go."

"I'll milk Bess if you like, ma?" Polly volunteered.

"No. One cow's nothing, and you can go to the dairy, if Marigold will excuse you."

"I'm off myself," said the girl. "Can I have a laze in the barn? I'm sleepy, and Ruth won't find me there. Since she fell out with Amy she's always hanging on to me, and it's so *hot*!"

"A big, fat, white slug," Polly said slowly.

"Now, don't you go calling people names," Mrs. Gee commanded from the door. "Or one of these days you'll get a hump yourself! She's as the Almighty made her."

Polly giggled, but, nevertheless, straightened her back.

"That's just like ma!" she said, as her parent departed. Into her face came a far-off look. "When shall we go on the launch again?"

The question surprised Marigold, her one wish before Piers had come, and now it had lost its appeal.

"You'd better ask Dr. Janet."

"I will, before that old cat returns." Not Smut, but the Deaconess. "So long!"

Left in the kitchen, Marigold found a basket and put the eggs, scones and salt inside. Wouldn't they have fun to-night! It was marvellous to be engaged, but Piers would go away, and he wouldn't get leave again for three months, so he had told her. If only he could marry her first? Mother would have to give in then. Suddenly, into her mind came the conversation with Mrs. Brown, whilst she had been kneading bread. A Scottish marriage? It

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only required two witnesses. But where could she find them?

It was hopeless to ask anyone on the island as they might go straight to Aunt Janet; even Charlie, with her hatred of men, and she didn't know a soul outside. Except Jean? No, that wouldn't do. Marigold crossed to the barn, cool after the blazing sunshine, and lay down on the sweet-smelling hay, her handkerchief between it and her hair. In the silence she could hear the martins twittering under the eaves, as they flew in and out to feed their second broods. They hadn't to scheme when the Spring came, but choose their mates in an orgy of love. She wanted to do the same, give herself to Piers. Why not? It was Nature's plan. Even the butterflies made love in the sunshine! So still she lay that a rat stole out from behind the cornbin and proceeded to groom his whiskers; be smart for his lady, the girl thought, smiling, then turned to the problem anew. Of course! Piers could bring two of his flying friends to the Ram, then fetch her, and they could swim out together, to be married there. They wouldn't be seen from the Castle if they kept to the farther side. Two men he could trust. She was feeling drowsy again, and satisfied, she drifted off, to dream of her lover.

She awoke with a start, for Polly was shaking her shoulder.

"It's supper-time! Ma's gone up."

They hastened down the path, Marigold remembering last night's adventure, for here was the burn, into which Piers had nearly floundered. Her eyes were opened to the beauty of the island, with the setting sun adding a glow to the heather bells, and the tall firs, dark against a rosy cloud. On its height stood the grim tower, no longer a prison, for Piers would free her. The whole world had changed since the night when he had found her in the hammock—and hadn't kissed her! But they'd made up for that since. She saw Polly gaze through a gap in the trees at a solitary boat on the calm sea, and felt sympathetic.

"We must have another picnic on the launch," she told the girl. "Before mother returns. Not just yet, but I'll try to work it."

"Do," Polly breathed, and slipped an arm round Marigold's waist, to give it a little hug before they parted at the door in the wall.

Straightening her ruffled hair in the tower room, Marigold caught sight of Mrs. Mappin's photograph on the mantel-piece. Deceiving her? But she didn't play fair! So unlike the mothers in classical novels, who gave their daughters pretty clothes and helped them to marry. Have a baby, too, like Solange, with chubby legs and tiny fists. She had been a baby herself, so why wasn't mother fonder of her? All she seemed to care for was power. Marigold had heard one of the women who had left say this in a loud voice at the last interview, adding: "I'll not be a slave any longer!"

"Nor will I," the girl murmured, and went in to supper, her golden head high, unaware of the likeness to Aylmer Leigh that would have added to the bitterness in Sybil's heart.

Later, she listened to Madame Ducroy at the piano, singing her *chansons d'amour* with the vibrato dear to her nation.

"Letting herself go," Amy whispered to Rachel. "So French? I don't call it very naice."

But Rachel made no response. She was back in the past, watching her commercial traveller enjoy the supper she had cooked. Clara, on her other side, was thinking of her honeymoon at Brighton, the rich food and the presents her pseudo-husband had given her. Old but experienced, he had made her happy. On the day he had taken her to a tiny oyster shop kept by two elderly sisters she had met the head of the institute who had sent her to nurse him. Dressed in her fine clothes, Clara had barely nodded to her old tyrant, with a tilt of her chin that said, "I'm as good as you now!" A fatal mistake, for when her house of cards collapsed, obliged to go back to nursing, there had been no vacancy for her. She glanced at Anna's calm face. Had plenty of fun, no doubt, in her time, living in chambers until her aunt let her down. Once a well-known suffragette, she had paid for her niece's education, pleased with her choice of the Bar, and given her a good allowance; the last woman one would expect to gamble on the Stock Exchange and ruin herself. Was it true, Clara wondered, that Anna had nearly starved after her first, and only, brief, before she had thrown up the sponge? A good thing that Mrs. Mappin's London solicitors had heard of the case and reported it. Skin and bones when she arrived!

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The music had stopped, Marigold leading the applause. Then Amy obliged with her favourite "piece," and accompanied Charlie in a popular song with a chorus. The concert was over, and everyone said how hot the room was. In the hall good nights were exchanged, and finally, Miss Plowden kissed her pupil, after locking the tower door.

Half an hour later Marigold stole through it, in her new cotton dress, the violets pinned to one shoulder, and her lover's ribbons on her plaits, pale green. She had so much to carry that she could not wait to hear the putter of his boat. It fell on her ears as she placed the basket in the hammock, and then busied herself by the swimming pool. Midsummer Day was past, so this must be the "Eve of St. Agnes." She strove to recall the luscious fruit and the spices beloved of Keats. What was "cumin"? She must ask Miss Plowden.

Her task accomplished, she sought the verandah, the blue kimono with its flight of storks over her arm. He would look fine in that with his blue eyes, and plenty of room for his shoulders. It was such a hot night that the length wouldn't matter, and she had provided for his modesty—she giggled—with something better than safety-pins. How funnily men were made!

This time she leaned on the rail, feeling safe; her fourth night in the suite alone, and everyone believed her happy there. She saw Piers climb down the rocks and the familiar gesture as he pressed back his hair.

"Goldie!" he cried as he drew near. "How nice you look! I won't be long, shall stay as I am."

"No, get out of that wet thing, darling. I've brought you my kimono." She smiled at him as he mounted the steps. "And, as it's rather airy, these!"

She extended a pair of faded pink knickers, outsize, and stretched by her parent. After one look he covered his face and sobbed:

"My step-ins! Gosh, I wish Tiny could see them!"

"Won't they do?" she asked anxiously. "I took the elastic out of the knees. Oh, do be sensible!"

"I am, my sweet. But I never saw such a size!" He was still shaken by mirth. "Do you know how trousers were invented? By an Emperor, who walked behind an elephant and admired the dignity of his hind quarters! Still, jolly useful! Plenty of space for quiet thought."

Presently, she heard him laugh again, and he reappeared, holding out his skirts, which revealed scanty pink frills above his long legs, pointing his toes in the braided sandals.

"The ballerina! Let's dance!" An arm round her waist, he began to hum the latest fox-trot, and down the broad verandah they swept on the smooth boards. Long practice with Charlie had prepared her for this exciting event—to dance with a man! She glowed with pride when he murmured, "You're splendid!" Then, drawing her closer as a cloud covered the moon: "Spot-lights going out. Now's our chance!" His lips on hers she felt him tremble, and finally, sigh. Breathless, they drew apart.

Marigold was the first to recover.

"Do you see your ribbons?" she asked him.

"Yes—where's that sponge-bag?"

He was off to retrieve it, whilst she waited on the bench. What was he bringing her now?

"Muss is a rotten hole for shopping," he grumbled, and sat down beside her. "I tried to find a ring—hopeless! Only one jeweller, with a lot of rubbish, but he had some brooches with our badge on them, so I fell back on that. Better than nothing! Here you are, darling."

Marigold opened the little case and saw the wings, in enamel on gold.

"But it's heavenly," she breathed, and lifted her glowing eyes to his. "The birdman?"

"That's it. I'll give you something better one day." Her kiss was the full measure of her gratitude, and he thought, had there ever been such fresh lips? "It could go here." He touched the fastening on her breast. "You'd better do it." And watched her slim brown fingers at work. "Looks quite nice."

"It's the first piece of jewellery I've ever had! Except a silver bangle when I was five, and I lost it." She tucked in her chin to look. "I simply love it!"

"Then don't leave it about, or people might guess."

"I shall put it in my secret drawer."

She told him of her discovery, as he drew a cigarette from his case in the sponge-bag—no good offering it to her—and lit up.

"Nice place to hide my love-letters?"

"Have you thought of a way?" she asked eagerly.

"Not yet, but we must." He did not want to dim her

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happiness and he changed the subject. "To-night we'll go up that path to the Castle. A little later perhaps, when all your nuns are snoring."

"We might," she said doubtfully, and glanced at the moon, then at his keen face, with the contrast of his blue eyes and black hair, inclined to curl—a curse to him—and rigidly repressed. A dimple stole out near her mouth. "It was hot, dancing. Aren't you thirsty?"

Suggestion worked.

"I am, a little." His eyes twinkled. "Are you going to lead me to the burn?"

"No, the beer!"

"What?" He rose to his feet. "You're pulling my leg?"

"Come and see!"

"This is a dangerous game," he told her as they moved up the path. "Lead a man to the brink, and then deny him! It's meant trouble before. What are you doing?"

She was bending down to untie a piece of string attached to a post at the shallow end of the pool, where once a rope had been drawn across for a small child, learning to swim. She pulled, and up came a bottle!

"To keep it cool," she explained. "It's the beer you like. We get it from the inn."

"You're a wonder! The more I think of it the more I feel you'll make an excellent wife." He wiped the bottle on his kimono. "I suppose you didn't remember a glass?"

"I did, but that's only part of the surprise." She ran to the hammock and lifted out the basket. "Supper after the ball! Isn't that right?"

"Quite right, my sweet."

"Come into the wood, then." They settled down at their favourite spot where the dust of the pine needles made a soft cushion. "A clean towel for a cloth! You don't mind? I had to be careful." She spread it between them. "These are buttered scones. Do you like plover's eggs?"

"You bet! But one can't get them."

"We can! It's our island." Proudly, she laid them out. "Now, fill up your glass."

"This is wizard!" He poured out the beer and was raising it to his lips when he checked himself. "Nice manners I've got! Yours, darling."

"No, I don't like it! I'm not a bit thirsty. I'm going to have an egg and a bit of scone."

"Take a sip first?" he pleaded.

To please him, she did, and screwed up her face.

"It's bitter! Let's begin; there are cheesecakes to follow."

When the last crumb had vanished he beamed at his little hostess.

"That's the best supper I've ever eaten! I was rather hungry, too, as I fed early. The landlord was expecting friends and it's really their parlour." He picked up a piece of shell. "Mustn't leave these about, or we'll have that cat again."

"It was Smut, from the farm." Marigold looked mischievous. "On his way to court Mrs. Brown's Tibby. He was out all night!"

"I don't blame him! Animals get the best of things, they haven't to wait."

"Nor have we, in Scotland."

"What do you mean by that profound remark? You mustn't tempt me, darling, not after beer!"

"Then tell me something." Her eyes searched his.

"Would you like to marry me right away?"

"At this moment? By gosh, I would!"

She fenced him off.

"Wait—I don't want to be kissed! I want you to listen. It's perfectly easy. We must have two witnesses and say before them that we're husband and wife, that's all! It's been done," she hurried on. "Mrs. Brown's brother-in-law's grandmother——"

"Hold on a minute." He grinned, "I've got it!"

"Went to Scotland and married a gillie that way, but her mistress—she was a lady's maid—was worried about it and asked a lawyer. It was perfectly sound. So why couldn't we?"

"I've heard something like that before," said Piers thoughtfully. "But I don't believe it's legal now. They've done away with Gretna Green."

"That's on the Border, but this is Scotland. What did you mean by 'getting permission'?" She could not wait and ran on, "How long would it take?"

"I'm not sure. They make drastic enquiries, to be certain that neither is married already. Otherwise, the girl couldn't claim a penny if he conked."

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"Don't!" Marigold shuddered. "But I've plenty of money! I heard mother talking of it to Aunt Janet before she left. I wasn't listening, but the bathroom door was open and my hands were wet. It was in father's will. When I'm twenty-one, or marry."

"I've plenty myself," Piers said, rather stiffly. "My uncle would see to that."

"And your Colonel needn't know." She heard him correct her, "Group Captain," but nothing could stop her now. "We'd keep it a dead secret, do it on the Ram with two of your friends as witnesses. I can easily swim out there. Just think how nice it would be to feel safe?"

Silently, he agreed, the old fear recurring. So young and impulsive, longing to escape from her mother's harsh rule. If they left the island she might meet another man who attracted her. An engagement wasn't enough if they couldn't write to each other, but she would feel bound by that ceremony. It might force her mother's hand, and they could be married later, with full permission, when the chance arose. He did not mean to take advantage of what might be an obsolete custom. Better be sure on the point.

"I could write to my solicitors," he began, but she interrupted him:

"Why? It's only wasting time! The weather might change, or anything, and mother comes back next week. I *know* it's all right, and it would make me so happy!" She threw her arms round him. "If you loved me you'd do it!"

"All right," he said, overwhelmed. "But there's another snag. Your mother's consent. I'm not sure it's legal without it."

"She'd never give it! She hates men." Puzzled, she studied his frowning face. "Oh, I see! I mightn't get my money. Is that what you mean?"

"I do not." He was angry, but a soft palm covered his lips.

"Don't be cross, darling. I was thinking of myself. Aunt Janet declares that a girl should have a *dot*, to save her pride, that it's dreadful for her to go to her husband for every penny!" Her voice softened. "But I shouldn't mind from you. I took your beautiful brooch, though I'd nothing to give you."



"And what about the spade guinea?" he asked, touched.  
 "Worth a lot, but I didn't say I couldn't accept it."

"Yes, you did!" She touched his chin, smiling. "But I made you!"

"And then you tried to drown me in the burn!"

"Only because you pretended to be fond of—that Maggie!"

He threw back his head and laughed.

"You needn't worry; she's Tiny's girl, between ourselves. You're not comfy." He drew her on to his knee, and her bare legs brushed his. "Don't you ever wear stockings?"

"No. Aunt Janet wanted to give me a pair—of *silk*, fancy that! But mother objected."

"She seems to object to everything. What's the idea?"

"To keep me a child!" Mischief brought a golden gleam to her eyes. "That's why I mayn't go to Muss, because there are dangerous young airmen about! What are you doing?"

"Wondering if you could get into Cousin Selina's sandals!" His hand stroked her ankle. "You've such pretty feet—I saw them in the hammock. Why do you wear these canvas things?"

"They're all I have."

"They're too large. What size do you take?"

"Fours. These are four and a half, to last! Miss Plowden was shocked by my clothes when she helped me to put them away." She told him what her mother had done, and saw his face darken. "But Solange has given me a lovely wrapper. I put it on for you on Sunday—and then you didn't come!"

"You'd spoil it here. I like you as you are, smelling of violets."

"That's the bunch she gave me. It's scented!"

Piers bent his head to test this, and kissed her throat. A gleam of moonlight was penetrating their retreat, resting on her upturned face, full of love for him.

"Time we had our walk," he said abruptly. "So up you get!"

"You've not caught a cold?" she asked.

"No, it's the beer! Give me that basket."

"The bottle must go in. They count the empties."

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She waited for him to light another cigarette, and they walked soberly out of the wood.

He was regretting the kimono. Cool as it was, it would show up more than the dark coat. At the foot of the steep ascent he raised his eyes.

"Is that a wall I see?"

"Yes, round the garden."

"Then I'll take that side, and we won't talk."

They began to climb. He felt safer when they reached the shade of the conifers. To his disappointment, he found that the path ended at the tower door. There was no getting round the island. Marigold took the basket from him, and put a finger to her lips. Better hide it now, she decided, and inserted the key in the well-oiled lock. Standing back against the wall, Piers watched her enter, listen, and turn up the light. Presently, tempted, he put his head round the corner. She was burrowing into a cupboard among her dresses, and he looked swiftly about him. It was not at all what he had expected, gloomy, with its dark panels, and curiously bare. On the dressing-table was a hairbrush, the varnish washed off its wooden back, a comb and a common shoe-horn, with a cheap little tray holding pins and, pitiful attempt, a vase of harebells. He remembered his sister's room, her set in blue enamel, and all the dainty trifles dear to her sex, and his heart contracted. What a background for his golden girl! At this moment she saw him and, frightened, locked the door on the hall. He advanced to study a photograph on the mantelpiece, flanked by a Bee clock, and a ragged Teddy bear. The portrait was of a handsome woman in an old-fashioned evening dress, taken, he guessed, before the island episode. She had beautiful eyes, and a hard mouth that accentuated her air of pride. Well-bred, accustomed to rule, and merciless, he summed her up.

"Your mother?" he whispered, and saw Marigold nod impatiently. "We'll go! Better unlock that door."

She rejoined him on the path outside, wondering why he looked so grave.

"Anything wrong?" she asked at last.

"No, my sweet. I was planning ahead."

They had reached the door in the wall, and pausing, she opened it a crack.

"Have a peep at the Castle," she told him.

## THE ISLAND

He did so, and saw it would be easy to slip across behind a long row of peas to the opposite cliff. No! He renounced the chance of winning his bet. There must be no more risks, with a mother like that. Tiny would rejoice. Then let him! He would do for one of the witnesses, and what about Robin Sturt? Both men who could keep a secret. When they saw his golden girl they would understand. If only he could take her away and give her all she wanted! A wave of protection swept over him, and he closed the door, then put a gentle arm round her, aware of a new element in his love.

When they reached the verandah he said:

"Sit down for a minute. The moon will be later to-night, and I want to talk to you. I shall run over to the aerodrome and look up two friends of mine. I've told you about Tiny; the other is Robin Sturt. If they agree to be our witnesses I'll try to fix it up at once. They'll have to get late passes and borrow a car, dine with me first—the excuse—so it mayn't be to-morrow night, but you'd better be ready in your swim-suit. You can always change if they don't come."

"Yes. But don't leave it too late."

"I won't." He looked down into her radiant face. "You do understand, darling, that it's a toss-up, mayn't be legal?"

"So you say! But you couldn't marry anyone else!"

Surprised at having the tables turned on him, he smiled.

"I shouldn't want to. There's only one golden girl." He stared across the swimming pool, measuring the risk for her. Supposing she let the secret slip, be beaten and cruelly treated? She might, in a fit of revolt. He saw the best way to prevent this. "You'll never tell anyone, Goldie? You must promise me that, not only for your sake, but mine."

"Would you be punished?" she asked quickly.

"I'd lose my wings." A wild statement, but it would do. "Go down to the bottom in rank," he explained.

"Because you hadn't permission?" Her face filled with horror and she broke out, "I swear I'll never tell! Not even if I'm thrashed!"

"You won't be unless your mother knows, and I don't see how she can guess. You can trust Robin and Tiny, and I'm taking precautions at the inn. So it rests with

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

you, my sweet." His arm went round her. "But if you've any doubt let's put it off and be married properly when it's possible."

"No, now! Something lovely to remember when you're gone." She looked pleadingly into his face. "When *must* you go?"

"On Saturday, I'm afraid. It's no good waiting over Sunday without a boat, and the trains are so bad. It's a tiresome journey, and my uncle expects me." He heard her whisper:

"Only three more nights."

"This time, but I'm coming back, and I had a brain wave just now. How do you get your newspapers?"

"The launch brings them on Wednesdays. They keep *The Times* for us, and Charlie calls for them. We used to take in the *Weekly Times*, but it's no good for lighting fires. The other is best for that."

"How pleased the Editor would be! Don't you ever read them?"

"Mother does, and I look at the pictures. Why?"

"Because I could put a message for you in the Personal Column. That's on the front page, next to the marriages and deaths. Say once a month, or it might attract attention. Start it with G—that means a 'long kiss to Goldie'—and sign it——" He thought for a moment whilst she drank in his words. "I know! B.-M., for birdman. How's that?"

"Too heavenly for words! Especially when war breaks out." She slipped a hand into his. "I shall be so anxious! Supposing you go to France and the messages stop?" She caught her breath. "I couldn't bear that!"

"And how am I to bear not hearing from you at all? I'm sure you could work it with Charlie. You *must*, Goldie." A new idea struck him. "Can anyone else drive the launch?"

"No. Mother was going to learn, but she didn't."

"Well, there you are! She'd never sack Charlie and be stranded. If she goes to the paper shop she can easily post your letters. They needn't be directed to me. You can put them inside another envelope to my old nurse, who lives in the village. I'll fix that up with her. See how simple it is?"

"I'm not sure." Marigold was troubled. "Charlie might guess, and she hates men."

"Good Lord!" Always the same obsession. Piers scowled. "Is she dependent on your mother?"

"Yes. She gets a little pocket-money, but she works for nothing, like the others."

Unpaid servants, Piers was thinking, and it would take a big staff to run the Castle. There was method in Mrs. Mappin's madness!

"Do you get pocket-money?" he asked.

"No. I couldn't spend it on the island. Mother generally gives me something useful at Christmas, and on my birthday."

The common hairbrush! Piers hated the woman.

"Some day I'll give you all you want," he said tenderly. "So think how you could write to me, and we'll have a talk to-morrow. Did you bring those snapshots?" He watched her draw them out of her pocket. "This is good, playing tennis . . . and I like this one on the steps. I shan't let my uncle keep them! I could cut out that head and put it behind my watch." Peering at them he noticed how dark it had become. "I must go, or I shan't see my way! But I'll tuck you up in the hammock first."

"No, hurry up, darling, the moon's gone. I shall sleep in my room." She watched him vanish with the wet swim-suit. Her eyelids were pricking—she mustn't cry! He had trouble enough. When he reappeared she forced a smile. "Give me the step-ins!"

A new and enchanting word, but he divined her mood when he took her into his arms.

"Promise me you won't lie awake fretting? It will all come right. How beautiful your eyelids are, and those dark lashes with your golden hair." He kissed her tenderly "I can see you now, on the Worthing beach all bunched up in bathing drawers, throwing your wooden spade at me! I believe I fell in love with you then, though I forgot the pink mug. I must find you a wedding-present, if Muss will rise to one. What do you want?"

"You. That's all."

Her voice with its infinite trust still rang in his ears as he picked his way over the rocks and began to swim. He must be worthy of it, even if the marriage were legal. He dared not make enquiries at the inn. Already, his nocturnal habits had laid him open to suspicion, and he smiled, remembering how he had met it, with a red herring that

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

drew the landlord away from the Castle. A useful word, "hush-hush"! When he reached the Ram he looked at his watch, and whistled. Half-past one, and he must be up early to-morrow.

It was long after this when Marigold closed her eyes. It had been such a breathless romance that until to-night she had never clearly envisaged the future. Now it loomed up before her, the endless waiting, and if war came danger for Piers. One message a month was better than nothing, but there would be anxious weeks between them when Hitler did his worst, and she couldn't keep the man she loved starving for news. She went through the list of her friends at the Castle who were allowed to go to Muss. Mrs. Gee? No! She had been angry about Polly, and might seize the chance of telling Mrs. Mappin that her daughter was just as bad, or even consider it her duty. Anna was the most independent, but she never went to Early Service, and when mother returned there would be no more sketching expeditions. The only hope was another picnic in the launch, with the chance of throwing a letter ashore, praying that someone would post it. Worn-out with conjectures she drifted off. . . .

She awoke to find Miss Plowden gazing down at her.

"Is it late?" she asked, frightened. "I'm sorry!"

"Eleven o'clock! I've been in twice, and decided to let you sleep it out."

"How sweet of you!" Marigold sat up and hunted for an excuse. "I was restless. So hot in here!"

"I wondered if that boat had disturbed you. It seemed to come very near the island. The motor one that goes to Muss."

"No." Marigold survived the shock. "I've heard it before. I must open that door, it's stifling!"

"I'll do it." Miss Plowden was secretly worried. Was the girl going to be ill? So pale, with those shadows under her eyes. In the doorway her expression changed, and she said severely, "You haven't been smoking, Marigold?"

"No. Why?"

"There's a cigarette-end on the path."

"It isn't mine." Her voice sounded strange in her ears. "Honestly. I don't like them!"

"Probably, Clara's, then. I remember she was marking out the lawn, and she may have come through to look at

the sea." Miss Plowden became brisk. "You'd better have tea and a boiled egg to tide you over until dinner."

"In bed? What a treat!"

The governess smiled.

"I notice you don't ask about lessons! Still, it won't hurt you, for once, to have a rest. I must tell Mrs. Brown about your breakfast."

Off she went, thinking how selfish the mother was to shut up her big, airy room when Marigold could have slept there. In the tower with its deep, narrow windows there was always a faint smell of age, due to dry rot and crumbling plaster.

Marigold's eyes turned to the open doorway. How careless of Piers! She must warn him. Would they all be talking about the boat? Nothing must happen now to upset their last nights together.

To her relief, Charlie put this right at dinner.

"Heard a queer thing to-day when I fetched the papers," she announced. "Two men were buying baccy, and one said to the other: 'Do you know what's going on up the coast? Some sort of hush-hush work; a new detector for aircraft, I fancy. But don't repeat this.'" Charlie grinned. "'It was told me in confidence.' And the other said: 'I've heard a rumour. The R.A.F. are in it. They land on that little island off Rual with some sort of gadget. By night, the only time they can work. It's between ourselves, of course.'" A scornful chuckle. "And they say women can't keep a secret!"

"Then that's where the motor-boat goes to," Miss Plowden exclaimed. "I heard it as I was getting to bed, rather late; I'd been reading."

"I heard it, too," said Amy. "So long as they don't land here!"

"They wouldn't do that," Janet, who had been listening, declared. "They couldn't get further than the jetty, and the boatman would tell them it wasn't allowed."

Ruth had seen Marigold's colour rise and decided it was from suppressed amusement.

"What's the joke?" she asked, across the table.

Startled, the girl collected her wits.

"I was thinking of the Deaconess. How she'd go out in her red flannel dressing-gown and shoo them off!" She giggled. "Too wizard!"

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

A fatal slip, but luckily, Anna chimed in:

"You've been reading that book—what was its name? About a young airman, his favourite expression."

"A very silly one," said Amy, scornfully. "But then, they're only boys!"

"Who may yet save this country," Miss Plowden reproved her. "We shall need them when war breaks out."

Marigold was glad when dinner was over and she could slip away to her favourite haunt on the cliff beyond the warren. How clever Piers had been! To-night, if two airmen dined with him it would substantiate the story. Lying on the grass in the shade of the tree her spirits were rising. Would they come? Somehow, she felt certain of it, then she and Piers would be one. Looking up at the leaves cutting off the blue sky, she repeated the lines of her favourite poet, lately memorised:

Good night? Ah no! the hour is ill

Which severs those it should unite;

Let us remain together still,—

Then it will be *good* night.

How can I call the lone night good,

Though thy sweet wishes wing its flight!

Be it not said, thought, understood,—

That it will be—*good* night.

The third verse eluded her, and her thoughts wandered. To whom had Shelley written this? How marvellous it must have been to be loved by him, but she wouldn't exchange him for Piers, with his keen face, and the blue eyes that could fill with mischief, the next moment with adoration. There was no one like him in the world! With his lips on hers she felt that she could defy her mother, be beaten, if it came to that, and still smile. His wife? Then no one could part them.

## CHAPTER IX

"WE mustn't keep them waiting," said Piers, undoing the sponge-bag. "But I want to give you my wedding-present. Not these!" Out came three pairs of silk stockings, and he dived again. "Here they are! Only



Scotch pearls, very small, but I thought you'd like them."

Marigold gasped when she opened the case and lifted the little string, milky against the dark velvet.

"Oh, darling, how lovely!" Under the white rubber cap her eyes shone, and she stood on tip-toe to hug him. "You shouldn't have done it! I've nothing for you," she wailed.

"Haven't you!" His eyes ran over her slender body in the swim-suit that had shrunk from long use and revealed every youthful curve. "You're perfect," he whispered, and sighed. "If only we could go off on our honeymoon to-night!"

"Let's?"

"No." He stepped back from her. "Those men can't stay late, so come!"

"I *must* have another look at my pearls! And the silk stockings." She ran a hand into one, and smiled up at Piers. "My first! How did you guess the size?"

"You told me you wore fours in shoes."

"So that was why you asked. Good-bye, my beauties!" Folding her treasures carefully in the kimono, she thrust the bundle under the bench. "I'm ready! Though I haven't thanked you properly. I'll do that when we return."

She was bending to untie her canvas shoes, and he checked her.

"Keep those on till we're over the rocks. We'll find a corner for them. And take your time swimming. If you feel tired, tell me and I'll give you a tow."

"Tired, on a night like this?" She laughed at him. "I swim like a fish!"

It was true, he discovered, when the cool water received them. On the Ram two figures, watching, saw the dark and the white-capped head rise and fall on the gentle movement of the tide.

"Swims well, but it's a rum show," said the shorter man. "Still, I couldn't refuse, the way he put it. A bit of a gamble?"

"Yes, but old Chump's all right," the other declared stoutly. "Though I never thought he'd fall so hard. That mother of hers must be mad!"

"Sounds like it. We'd better be out of the way when they land." He looked behind him at the slope of rough

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

grass. "That rock would do. He'll want to cover her up, brought his bath-robe." A grin appeared on his chubby face. "All rights reserved?"

The islet seemed deserted when at length the pair reached the little beach and the two boats. Piers bent over the first and produced a bath towel, and a dressing-gown in the same material.

"Here you are, darling. Wipe your face, and then get into this."

Marigold, smiling, obeyed, and her hands disappeared. He turned back the cuffs, then undid the snap under her chin and drew off the rubber cap.

"That's better. Oh, hairpins!" Out they came, and he arranged the golden plaits on either side of her rosy face, thinking that not many girls would rub it like that, without a thought of powder. "You look fine! We'll go up on the grass. Hold up your skirts or you'll trip." Arrived there, he gazed round him, and grinned. "Very discreet, aren't they?"

At his whistle two heads appeared from behind the rock, and Marigold saw a tall, spare man with a long face, and then his companion, short and round, but well-drilled. He had a snub nose and a wide, mischievous mouth. They reminded her of the lion and the unicorn! Excited, she prepared to meet more of the unknown sex.

Introductions followed. How stiff they were, she thought, and tried to break the ice.

"I've heard of you." She smiled at the short man. "You're Tiny!"

"No, him." He indicated his companion, who could not take his eyes off the girl. "It's like this——"

"We'd better get on with it," Piers interrupted, with an air of authority new to Marigold. He turned to face her. "Give me your right hand. But first, Marigold, you do understand that this mayn't be a legal marriage."

He wanted his friends to hear her reply.

"I do. Though I'm sure it is! Mrs. Brown's brother-in-law's grandmother——" She caught a stifled sound and saw Robin convulsed. "I know!" she laughed. "It's rather a mouthful, but she was all right. I mean——"

"Marigold?" Piers sounded impatient. "Now." His eyes were fixed on hers gravely. "I take you for my wife, before these two witnesses. Repeat that."

. "I take you for my wi—husband, before these two witnesses."

His fingers tightened, then released her. She was going to raise her face to be kissed, but resisted the impulse, for the first time in her life self-conscious.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Yes. For you."

Even Piers had stiffened. Was it the effect of the other pair's uniform? How exquisitely neat they were, not a hair astray, the little peaks over their eyes at the same angle.

"You've the papers, Tiny?" Piers asked, and watched the tall man produce two written sheets from his pocket, and a fountain-pen. "You sign first, with your full name and address."

"Make a back," Tiny ordered Robin, who bent over obediently.

Marigold watched, fascinated, as the tall man obliged in turn. How supple they were! In a different way from women. She wished she could see Piers in his uniform; Air Force blue—she had read that somewhere. He was inspecting the papers.

"That's all right," he said. "We'll put them on the grass to dry. Get some pebbles, Robin, and you can bring up the fizz." He turned to Marigold and smiled for the first time. "To drink your health," he explained.

She watched the tall man go to the motor-boat, fish out a bottle with a gilt-foiled neck and some glasses.

"You'd better sit down and rest, darling," Piers whispered. "Gosh! I forgot the sponge-bag, and you'll have to keep one of those papers."

"It's all right," she soothed him. "I can put it under my rubber cap."

Beautiful, but not dumb, Robin decided, weighing down the corners of the marriage "certificates."

"So you can! That's a relief. Here's Tiny! Looking thirsty, though that's nothing unusual." Piers stretched out his hand for the bottle.

"I'll bottle," Tiny announced. His long face lit with a charming smile. "The best man's chosen task! You hold the glasses, Chump."

Presently, there came a pop and the wine flowed. Tiny held up his to the girl, then hesitated.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"Good luck, and—happy landing!" he brought out jerkily.

Robin had prepared his toast.

"The very best! May you be as happy as Mrs. Brown's grandmother's brother!"

"That's all wrong!" she gurgled. "Happier, I hope! Mrs. Brown said that everything was 'all right, though she had a hard life, her husband being too fond of his whisky!'"

"Same here." Robin jerked a thumb at Piers. "You'll have to keep him in order, Mrs. Chomeley."

He saw the surprise on her fair face, etherealised by the moon, and her swift glance at the man who was praying he was her husband.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said simply.

It was Tiny who nodded. He had been afraid that some gold-digger had caught his friend, an excellent match. Now he was convinced that all he had been told was true. He broke the soft silence.

"I say, we've forgotten you, old man. Here's to the lucky bridegroom!" He drank. "Now give Mrs. ——"

"Marigold, please?" she urged.

"I'd like to." He filled the third glass and passed it to her. "You must join in this, and then Chump will make a speech."

Hoping it wasn't like the beer, she complied.

"It's nice!" she exclaimed, wide-eyed, and peered into the tumbler. "Look at the little bubbles coming up!"

"Don't sip it," Piers warned her. "Or you'll get tight."

"Shall I? I don't care!" Laughter broke out, sweet to her ears, and she smiled at the trio. "Why don't you all sit down?"

They grouped themselves round her. Robin started the conversation:

"I don't think I've ever seen you at Muss."

"I'm not allowed to go there. I haven't been off the island since we came, eleven years ago. Not until last Saturday. Mother was away and we had a picnic on the launch for——" She pulled herself up, on the verge of "my birthday," and substituted, "hours! A lovely day! I do hope this heat wave will last."

"Sure to, as long as the wind remains in this quarter," Robin pronounced..

"I suppose you learn all about the weather when you fly? I'm simply longing to go up there!"

"And meet a gremlin?" He saw she did not understand. "They're the fairies in the air, or rather, imps."

"No?" She was thrilled. "What are they like?"

"I've never met one, personally." He turned to Piers, smiling. "Have you?"

"I'm not sure. I saw something funny once, but it didn't linger. We're not very fond of them," he told Marigold. "But I've heard music, rather wonderful music, high up, in the stratosphere. I'll swear to that!"

"The song of the stars?" she said dreamily. "Oh, Piers, do take me flying!"

"I might, some day. On a private plane, have one of my own when we settle down." This brought him back to the present, and he looked at Robin's wrist-watch. "Nearly time for you to be off."

"We can always say the Ford broke down," Tiny put in lazily. "It's only held together by string. Rather temperamental, too. You remember that night when you took"—he paused for a moment, to let the tension grow—"a friend home, who had hysterics? Poor chap! No more, thanks." For Piers, relieved, was pouring the last of the wine into Tiny's glass. "We're robbing you!" He addressed Marigold, listening. "And you should always drink champagne. It goes with your hair."

"Princess Goldilocks," Robin murmured.

"Queer you should say that," Piers told him. "I christened her 'Goldie' when she was six." He saw the other's raised eyebrows. "We were friends as children, you know."

"And I recognised him in the plane!" Champagne was loosening the girl's tongue. "He came over the island twice! Wasn't it strange?"

"Yes," Tiny agreed, thinking, "sly dog!" Piers was praying that he wouldn't mention the bet, but Tiny turned to him, a wicked smile on his long face. "So you thought you'd return?"

"He waved to me," said Marigold, "And I waved back! An awful risk, but there was no one about."

Piers rose, fearing further revelations, and held out his hands to her.

"Come along! These men must go, start before I do.

## F O R B I D D E N   T O   M A N

I shan't stay long, and we don't want a blooming procession!"

"We could take the row-boat," said Tiny.

"Don't begin that again! I've plenty of time, but you haven't. A little exercise will do me good." He looked round him. "We mustn't leave any traces."

"Only the marriage certificates," Robin laughed, and gathered them up as Tiny became dramatic, a hand clutching his throat.

"Where are me lines?"

This was Greek to Marigold, but Piers chuckled. She was wondering what he had meant by "shan't stay long," when this was their wedding-night.

"Now we're off!" Piers folded one paper and gave it to her. "Take care of this. A nice game if we'd left them behind for anyone to read!"

When they reached the boats he put the other in the inner pocket of his coat on the pile of discarded clothes.

"Look here," said Robin, adding the bottle and piled glasses. "Why shouldn't we row you as near to the island as we can? Save you both a long swim."

"Don't shipwreck me," Tiny pleaded. "Daddy never taught me to swim!"

"Or forget to tie up the boat when you return and leave me marooned on the Ram," Piers added.

"On the what?"

"Ram. That's the name of this excrescence. Otherwise, a good idea. I can lie in the bows and look out for rocks. Hold on, darling!" He picked Marigold up, clutching the skirts of the long bath-robe, and put her down in the stern. "You all right?"

"Yes!" she gasped. "Give me my cap. Where are the hair-pins?"

"In your pocket."

They watched her roll up her plaits and secure them, then put the folded paper on top and fasten the clip under her chin. Now she looked like a nun, Tiny thought, a coif framing her innocent face. He recovered himself in time to slip into the seat beside her. Robin objected:

"You're going to row!"

"Not I. It was your concept—good word! I'm helping to steer."

## THE ISLAND

"I'd better do it," Marigold said practically. "I know the way. Do look out for sunken rocks, Piers."

"Well, well, well," Robin sighed, sat down and lifted an oar.

"I wouldn't push off until we're untied," his friend suggested. "But just as you like!"

They proceeded on their way with ribald mirth. Presently, Piers turned his head and checked them.

"Stop that, or we'll be heard at the Castle."

"Yes!" Marigold looked frightened. "It isn't safe!"

"What would they do to us?" Tiny asked, in a lowered voice, his eyes twinkling.

"I don't know, but I should be beaten."

They both stared at her in horror, and saw her nod solemnly.

"And you're running this risk?" Tiny, subdued, asked her.

"Wouldn't you if—if you loved anyone very much?"

"By gosh, he's a lucky chap!" He stared at her admiringly. "I wish we could help you. If we ever can don't forget us. Eh, Robin?"

"Rather not! You have our addresses on that paper."

"That's sweet of you. Only, I can't write, not even to Piers." Her eyes were sad. "Mother takes the letters to Muss once a week, and she'd open mine. That's the worst of it." Piers was looking round again, and she whispered, "Sh! I don't want him to remember, to-night."

"I think we're getting near enough," Piers announced. "Better pull up."

"Right!" Robin rested on the oars.

"We're off next month," Tiny said hurriedly in the girl's ear. "But in case of trouble before then I could swim out, like he does."

"What's that?" Piers asked, coming across, a hand on Robin's shoulder.

"Only talking of my plans." He looked up at his friend.

"You'll be over to say good-bye before you go?"

"If I can. I'm catching the morning train on Saturday."

"So soon?"

"Yes, worse luck! That's why I rushed you." His eyes turned to Marigold. "Better get out of that bath-robe now."

Tiny helped her and she stood up, lovely in her uncon-

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

sciousness, her mind absorbed in Piers. Smiling at him she cried:

"Now for a dive!"

"No!" He caught her arm. "I'll go first and see it's safe, then slip in gently. I'll be there. Good-bye, you chaps. See you probably, on Friday."

His long legs shot overboard, and Marigold watched anxiously for the dark head to reappear.

"Pretty deep," he spluttered, treading water. "Now, my sweet!"

"Coming—and thank you so much," she said to the others. "I shan't forget you." Her hands grasping the side, she threw at Tiny, "Your turn to row!" and laughing, let go.

The boat rocked, and Robin shifted to balance it. Tiny was following the swimmers with his eyes, Piers a little ahead, guiding the girl, a white arm flashing in the moonlight.

"I suppose he knows where the danger lies," Tiny muttered, and a short silence fell on the pair. "Good! He's up, holding out a hand to her. Now they're safe." He started as the boat, which had been drifting towards the shore, grated over something. "Gosh! We're on a rock!"

But Robin, already, was backwatering for his life. They floated clear, but he still continued the process.

"That will get your fat down," Tiny encouraged him. "Better turn."

"Then look where you're steering, you goon!"

They circled round, and now Robin owned the view.

"They've landed. He's putting on her shoes—ha!"

"What's happened?"

"She kissed him on the back of his neck and he spanked her. That's the way to start married life!"

"Will they start?"

"What's the betting?"

"I'm damned if I know! It mayn't be a legal marriage, probably isn't. Still, Chump will be careful."

Morality satisfied, Robin chuckled.

"Poor devil! I don't envy him the row home."

On the other side of the rocky barrier Marigold was in her lover's arms, hungry for his kisses. He felt a little shiver run over her and asked anxiously:



"You haven't caught cold?"

"More likely you! I was lovely and warm in your dressing-gown." She looked up into his face. "Did I behave properly?"

"Like a lamb!"

"You were so stiff, I wondered."

"Was I?" He smiled. "I couldn't make love to you before an audience. Now don't stand about, darling. You must have a rub down and then a run round the pool." No dark wood to-night, he was thinking, for the other men's admiration had added to his trouble.

"But I must look at my pearls again, and those heavenly stockings!" They mounted the verandah steps. "It was funny to be called 'Mrs. Chomeley.' I hadn't thought of that! It was all so quick, wasn't it?"

"Yes." There was a partition in the dressing-room, and he followed her in, the bundled kimono in her arms. "Don't look at that yet. Get dry," he told her.

"All right! Here are the towels."

Before he could stop her she had peeled off the swimsuit. They were married, so what did it matter? Her shoulder averted, he could see the little round breast glimpsed in the hammock, as she bent to rub her legs.

"Marigold, you mustn't!" he cried, though he could not take his eyes off her, lit by the moon through the end window. "You don't understand!"

"Oh yes, I do," she assured him, and glanced over her shoulder, her face warm and mischievous. "I'm not as silly as you think! Mrs. Gee told me all about it."

After his long restraint the reaction was too sudden. He could feel the blood pounding in his temples . . . he was lost!

The primrose light in the sky was turning to gold over the hills when he drew up the boat on the village beach, and stumbled across to the inn. Already the Furies were at his heels.

CHAPTER X

MRS. MAPPIN returned on the following Friday, glad to be home again. The Deaconess was not expected until Monday, to Janet's relief. Over tea in Sybil's room she told her of the picnic on the water, prepared for her reaction:

"You shouldn't have allowed it, Janet. It will make Marigold still more restless!"

"But it hasn't. She's had her wish and now seems perfectly happy. She did suggest another outing, but I said no, a birthday treat. Since then she has been very quiet. In fact, last week I was worried about her, such dark shadows under her eyes and she seemed languid. However, it passed. Only the hot weather, I fancy, and she found her room very close at night with the door shut."

"I thought of that when I heard you'd had a heat wave. Who went on the launch?" Sybil listened, and finally, frowned. "Polly? Really, Janet, you are naughty!"

"On the contrary. It's quite restored Mrs. Gee to her old form! It was Marigold who invited her, a kindly impulse, and you should have heard her conversation." Janet, repeating the salient features, had Sybil smiling now. "We didn't land, of course, but it was a nice change. By the way, I was rather in a hole on Wednesday. Mrs. Brown was feeling ill and I didn't like to leave her, so I sent Anna to Muss. You don't disapprove of that, I hope?"

"No, she's very steady. But why not Miss Plowden?"

"Because she didn't want any more interruptions in Marigold's lessons."

"I see. Well, it doesn't matter."

"That's what I thought, and as it was a calm day she did a little sketch of the harbour from the launch, which she hopes to sell. You must ask her to show it to you."

Sybil looked at her friend with growing suspicion.

"What was the matter with Mrs. Brown?"

"An attack of giddiness, and I'm always afraid of her having jaundice again. Madame Ducroy came to the

rescue, took over the cooking—oh, I must tell you about Amy and the salad!”

“So officious,” Sybil agreed. “Have there been any more quarrels?”

“Amy fell out with Ruth, and Rachel flew to the rescue, then I-reen with Clara over watering the garden. Nobody likes that task.” Janet’s grey eyes twinkled. “Even Madame Ducroy had a migraine!”

“Selina must help. She says she’s fond of gardening, did a good deal at the palace. Probably, put on gauntlet gloves and showed where the plants were to go! But I’ll have no one idle here.” Sybil’s mouth had hardened. “What has Marigold been doing?”

“It’s holidays now, and Miss Plowden wants her to rest. I think she’s a little anæmic. She never gets a change of air, like other girls of her age. I’m not suggesting she should go with us to Muss, but a turn in the launch occasionally would do her good, speaking as a doctor.”

“You always spoil her!”

“My suggestion, not hers,” said Janet firmly.

“It would mean a general relaxation of the rule. I’ll have no favouritism! I’m sorry, Janet, but it wouldn’t do.”

At this moment there came a tap at the door and Marigold appeared, a cabbage-leaf in her hand.

“The last of the yellow raspberries, mother. I hope I’m not too late?”

“No, I shall enjoy them. Thank you, my dear.” Gazing up at her daughter’s fair face Sybil was conscious of a change in it, indefinable but adding to its charm. “You’re looking very well.”

“I am! Have you noticed your room? I gave it a spring-cleaning yesterday.” In a sudden fit of remorse! “Charlie beat the carpet but I did all the polishing, as I thought you wouldn’t want people poking about.”

“Quite right. It’s very nice.” Sybil was pleased. “I must give you your birthday present, a warm cape for the winter. The man at the Stores said wool would become scarce if we had war, and it’s just the thing for the autumn mists, with a hood to cover your hair.” Her eyes rested on the plaits. “New ribbons, I see?”

“From Solange—she’s so kind! We’ve been sitting by the Pirate’s Rock talking French all afternoon, and singing

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*Sur le Pont d'Avignon!* That's where she lived as a child. But do eat your raspberries, mother."

"I will." Sybil picked one out. "Have you had your tea?"

"Not yet; it's early. Thank you so much for my cape." Sure to be ugly, the girl decided, but Piers wouldn't see it. "What have you brought the others?"

"Some warm combinations. Except Ruth, her size difficult, so I found some grey wool and Rachel can knit them. With a big box of chocolates, to be handed round." Mrs. Mappin still studied her daughter. "I believe you're taller, Marigold."

"I hope not!" For Piers liked her as she was. "There's the gong for tea!"

She escaped, Sybil's eyes following her.

"She's growing up fast, Janet. A pity! I suppose after being away I notice it more. But she seems well, and still attached to her dear Solange! I'm glad she's improving her French, and that Miss Plowden doesn't object."

"She's too broad-minded for that." The younger woman seized her chance. "I think you might reward her by allowing scripture lessons, don't you? It really is time the child knew something about religion, and I wanted to tell you privately that if you agree Miss Plowden hopes that the Deaconess won't interfere."

A clever touch; for Sybil exclaimed:

"Certainly not! I'll see to that. I wish Selina weren't coming back."

Marigold would have agreed, afraid of her cousin's sharp eyes. No one had guessed, although Piers had stayed over Sunday, for the landlord at the inn had persuaded the owner of the motor-boat to let it out that night as a patriotic duty. There had been gusts of rain all day, Marigold in despair, but after sunset the wind had dropped and her lover had appeared. The wood was drenched and they had passed their last night together in Marigold's room, with the arched door locked. She had her excuse if anyone came; the noises in the old tower and a sudden panic. But there had been no need for this. He had seen that she ran no more risks, and it had been an enchanted night whispering in his arms, though shadowed by the parting. Piers had bitterly reproached himself for his loss of control on their return from the Ram, but Marigold was

untroubled and more in love with him than ever. What he feared would not happen, she assured him at his outbreak: "I should cut my throat!" She mustn't stay on the island if his fears were realised, exposed to her mother's wrath. She could slip out at dawn and take the row-boat, if Charlie refused her help, and make her way to Muss. He brought her money and directions for her journey; to go to the *White Hart*, Lincoln, and telephone to Sir George, who would come to her at once. Piers would try for compassionate leave and permission to marry, if their first venture proved illegal. Everything would hinge on that. He had written to his solicitors, "on behalf of a friend," to settle the point and would enlighten her in his first message in *The Times*. The main difficulty, as ever, was how she could let him know. He would be on thorns until he heard from her.

"I've been thinking of that," she told him in the tower room. "If I swam out to the Ram and left a letter there would Tiny fetch it? I could put it in one of Clara's Gold Flake tins to keep it dry."

Sorely tempted, Piers considered the plan. Swim out alone, with those dangerous rocks?

"No! I don't see how he can, and he won't be there much longer. The best chance will be when war breaks out. Some official is sure to come to the island and you could ask him to post it, on the quiet. So have a letter ready."

"I'll do that, keep it next my heart." Her hand on his, she had added, "Shall I put in a sprig of lad's love?"

Now all those golden nights were over. The island was full of memories, but only in dreams was he near her. Going down after tea to the wood she glanced at the hammock and sighed, then remembered her promise to be brave. His last gift had been a New Testament, a slim volume bound in Russia leather. It had occurred to him that his uncle would be shocked to find she had never read it. On that endless last Sunday afternoon, with the rain lashing the window, he had marked a few passages familiar to him from his childhood. He dared not write her name inside, but this would be a secret message. The familiar words evoked a picture of his father, that sportsman and servant of God, accepting his crippled state as a time for meditation at the end of a busy life. Belief then had

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seemed natural to Piers, but since he had joined the R.A.F. he had let religion slide, save for the instinctive prayer that rises to a man's lips in a moment of danger. Nevertheless, he shrank from the idea that if anything happened to him the girl he loved held no faith in a future life.

Marigold had slipped the Testament down the front of her dress, and reaching the lone tree on the cliff she drew it from its hiding-place. The breeze off the sea fluttered the thin pages and, to her surprise, she saw one marked by a pencilled line in the margin. Piers must have done this! Eagerly, she read:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

What beautiful language! Like poetry, she thought, and indeed her heart was "heavy-laden" now her lover had gone. She looked at the context and saw these were the words of Jesus, the "younger God." Yet He called Himself "meek and lowly"! Somehow, that brought Him closer from the skies. She did not guess that the passage had been a favourite one of the man so sorely injured, who had never complained, but it made her determined to master the whole. There was nothing here of the Deaconess's austerity, her doctrine of punishment. You couldn't imagine *her* "meek and lowly"! Or bringing any sinner "rest." But this was what Marigold craved in her endless longing for Piers. She turned to the first chapter of the gospel "according to St. Matthew." A queer way of putting it. Was there any doubt attached?

It opened with a pedigree, rather disappointing, but at Verse xviii the "story" began—with a secret marriage and a baby! Or so it seemed to her. There were puzzling points, the "Holy Ghost," Cousin Selina's third God, and the statement that Joseph "knew not his wife" before the birth of Jesus. He must have done! With the Star in the East and the Wise Men the spirit of poetry returned. Keats would have loved the gifts of "gold, frankincense and myrrh." Marigold read on, fascinated, and failed to see the apricot light die out of the sky.

She was late for supper, and Mrs. Mappin reproved her.

"You have a watch. Why don't you look at it?"

"I'm sorry, mother. It's broken."

"Again?"

"Yes," Miss Plowden interrupted, for the girl looked distressed. "That's the worst of cheap watches. I once bought a beauty for seventeen and sixpence, and found at the end of the year I had spent nearly two pounds on repairs! First, a hand came off, then the winder, and finally, I lost the glass." She smiled at Mrs. Mappin. "And I'd been so proud of my bargain!"

Against her will, Sybil smiled too.

"I know! But it's no good giving Marigold anything better. She's so careless."

Not long ago the girl would have resented this public condemnation, but now she did not care. General talk recommenced and her thoughts wandered. Fancy killing all the babies in Bethlehem! What a wicked man! She found she was hungry, and thought of John, living on locusts and wild honey. How *could* he, those horrible insects? Then of Jesus and his forty days fast.

"Cheer up!" said Charlie across the table. "If you'll give me your watch I'll try and mend it. When I was asked to clean Big Ben I said I'd no head for heights! Didn't see myself explaining to the B.B.C. They *sound* gentle, but one never knows!"

It was good to hear Marigold laugh, for Charlie had shared Janet's anxiety in the past week. Just like Mrs. Mappin to start by dressing her down! Here Ruth, who after her quarrel with Amy had moved to the chair next to Marigold's, created a diversion:

"You've some scent on!"

"I haven't," Marigold protested, aware of the cause, Russia leather. There had been no time for hiding the precious volume, and she was afraid her mother might notice the slight bulge.

"Eet is me," Madame Ducroy said gaily. "In zis 'eat it is necessaire, and I am accustomed. 'Ow do you find London?" she asked Mrs. Mappin, to Marigold's relief.

At her end of the table Rachel asked Amy what she had been doing this afternoon.

"Turning out the dear Deaconess's room," the school

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teacher responded, with an air of virtue. "I couldn't find her sandals, though I looked everywhere!"

"I saw them in the bathing-shed," Marigold told her. She had re-tied the red braids, drawing them closer. "So they're all right!"

"I hope no one has been wearing them?" Amy's sallow face was suspicious. "She wouldn't like that."

"More probably, offer them to a museum," Janet said impatiently, and turned to Anna. "You're eating nothing! Headache?"

"No, toothache! I'm afraid I shall have to go to the dentist." He would discover nothing wrong, but she wanted another sketch of the harbour. "So tiresome!"

"You can come with me on Wednesday," Mrs. Mappin said flatly.

"Oughtn't I to make an appointment?" Anna enquired, with an innocent expression. "I don't want to sit there for hours and keep you waiting."

"I'll attend to that. Unless it's an abscess; but your face isn't swollen." A pause. "I must give you your paints after supper, those you asked me to buy."

So she had seen through it.

"Couldn't Dr. Janet pull out the tooth?" Ruth enquired.

"No," said that lady decisively.

"Why not?" the hunchback persisted.

"That's not your business, darling," Rachel checked her.

"Have you seen the new little pigs?"

Marigold was lost in thought. Could she trust Anna to post a letter, directed to the old nurse? Better wait for the message in *The Times*. They had agreed that these should appear on a Tuesday, to hold the latest news, and she counted on her fingers: five days more. She rose to change the plates and, her back to the company, thrust the New Testament down under her waistband. A holy book? Would Jesus mind? She didn't think so. He had said the Sabbath was made for man.

After supper came the presents, Anna studying Solange's face when she received the Jægar combinations.

"Eet is more zan kind, so warm in ze snow. Zey wash white, per'aps?" she asked hopefully.

"That is the natural colour," Mrs. Mappin told her.

"You will find they wear."

Marigold was giggling behind Charlie's back, remembering



the trousseau, as Solange murmured a thousand thanks and retreated from the oily smell of the wool. Most of the others were pleased, and it came to Marigold's turn. The poor child! the Frenchwoman thought when the duffle cape in navy blue was wrapped round her, with a large black button under the chin, her hair eclipsed by the hood.

"There!" said Mrs. Mappin proudly. "It's so thick you won't get wet, with plenty of room to move. Coats cling, I find."

"Yes, it's jolly," Marigold brought out, and disembarassed herself of the heavy folds. "Thank you ever so much, mother."

"It will do for your next trip on the launch," Amy said loudly, determined that Mrs. Mappin should hear of the expedition.

"So it will." Sybil smiled at her daughter. "Though that must be kept for a birthday treat. I hear you've had very hot weather."

In that moment the girl felt her old admiration revive.

"You ought to go to bed, mother," she urged. "You must be tired after your journey, and bringing home all these lovely presents."

"I've brought back the stores as well. We shall be busy to-morrow, so I'll take your advice, my dear, and say good night."

She sailed out, a faint smile on her face, for she had detected Amy's intention.

Ruth was clamouring for a game of draughts, and Marigold settled down to amuse the hunchback, and let her win. Meanwhile, in the library Anna was talking to Miss Plowden.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," the latter responded. "No more picnics! The laws of the Medes and Persians? A strange trait, for I'm sure she wishes us to be happy, but it must be according to her ideas."

"And I am to miss my chance," Anna said bitterly. "I was hoping to work here, and later on have a little show in town. Plenty of subjects on the mainland, but no going ashore! What does she expect me to do—carry on with a fisherman? And spend the rest of my life here! I gave her no guarantee of that. I'm saving every penny, and if I could raise a little capital I'd return to the Bar."

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

It's easier now for women, and some brilliant ones are coming to the fore. There are even solicitors among them. That was the trouble in my time. Unless a client insisted, briefs were given to men. The Law mistrusted us."

"Yes, very hard," Miss Plowden agreed. "I wish I could help you, my dear. I suppose Mrs. Mappin does not want to lose your society, though that seems rather selfish. I am troubled over Marigold, too, so restricted. A little indulgence now would be good for her, physically and mentally, yet even the small attractions of Muss are forbidden. This fear of men is becoming an obsession, though perhaps, I shouldn't say so."

"Why not?" Anna asked hotly. "We do the servants' work, unpaid, as Cecily pointed out when she left. We may, at least, be allowed freedom of speech. Ssh!"

The door had opened, and Ruth put her head in.

"I guessed you were here! It's only to say good night."

"Good night," the pair echoed, and waited until the clumping steps had died away.

"I hope she wasn't listening," Miss Plowden murmured. "Here's someone else!"

"Excuse me if I intrude?" It was Madame Ducroy. "But I go to ze tower to open my trunk, and look out of ze window. Zere is ze village under ze moon, so near zat I sink of a mirage. A picture for you, Anna! You come see?"

"Rather! Sweet of you, Solange. Good night," Anna cried to Miss Plowden, who smiled at her abrupt departure.

Another prisoner, she thought, her mind returning to her pupil. What would become of Marigold in the future with no knowledge of the world? And no religion. That night the governess remained on her knees longer than usual petitioning the Almighty for the girl she loved.

It seemed an answer to prayer next morning when Mrs. Mappin sent for her and told her of her new decision, the result of her talk with Janet. She added characteristically:

"But don't let her get sentimental about it! Just the ordinary scripture lessons, and I suggest we should keep them to ourselves. There is Amy Arkwright, for instance, who might like to put in her oar. Converts are always the worst!"

So true that Miss Plowden's eyes twinkled meeting the beautiful brown ones.

"I agree, and I shall warn Marigold. I don't want her mind confused. Thank you, Mrs. Mappin." She prepared to retire, then paused. "Is there anything I can do to help you? You mustn't overdo it now you've returned."

"No, thanks. Charlie and Clara are going to put away the stores under my direction, so I've plenty of assistance."

"Where they are not likely to be found?" the governess suggested shrewdly. "I remember in the last war the trouble over hoarding. Though we need have no scruples here with the storms that cut us off in the winter. Still, you might get a difficult inspector."

She saw Sybil's placid expression change.

"Shall we have *men* here?"

"I should think it's most probable. At the farm as well, to count the stock. There's no privacy in war-time, and any suggestion of this might rouse suspicion, especially in Scottish minds."

"What a complication!" Sybil frowned. "I never thought of it. But I shall certainly take your advice and camouflage the stores. We've plenty of dungeons! Thank you so much."

How charming she could be when she liked, Miss Plowden thought, and went back to finish dusting the schoolroom, passing Clara on the way, glad to get out of housework this morning. In her nursing days she had been waited upon and kept the servants in order, complaining if her meals were a minute late. At times, she regretted her old profession and the power it had given her. A sound of voices rose from the refectory, which Marigold was turning out with Amy, whilst Ruth pretended to help.

"You haven't rubbed that table enough," she told Amy importantly, and received a flick from the polishing cloth.

Unfortunately, the corner caught her eye.

"You've blinded me, you wicked woman!" she screamed, and in rushed Rachel.

"What is it, my pet? What have they done to you?"

"It's Imy! She hit me!"

"I don't think she meant to," Marigold explained, on her knees before the hunchback, who kept the eye tightly closed. "Let's have a look, Ruthie?"

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"Who asked you to interfere?" Amy had lost her temper. "You can finish the room. I'm not a slavey!"

"Tut-tut!" Mrs. Brown, attracted by the cries, had reached the doorway as Amy flounced out. "Nothing wrong there, my dear," she told Ruth, and cast a disdainful look at the retreating figure. "Common, that's what she is! I'm sorry for the children she taught! A pity she don't go and *live* in Russia!"

Peace restored, the work proceeded. All over the Castle women were busy, conscious of Mrs. Mappin's return. Even Janet in her cottage thrust papers into a cupboard and dusted the blue tea-service, cursing the task, her mind on her novel. There came an interruption in the shape of Charlie.

"Here!" She held out two tins of sardines. "I pinched these for you, Dr. Janet, so shove them away and say nuthin'!" She accepted a cigarette in thanks, and lit it. "I've had to take down most of the shelves and cart them to another cellar. More private in case we're inspected." Inhaling the smoke, she frowned. "An infernal nuisance if we have men here?"

"Why? They wouldn't stay long, and they'd ask for Mrs. Mappin." Janet was studying Charlie's face. "You see plenty at Muss, so what's the difference?"

"Marigold doesn't. I don't want them to get at her. She's always reading those silly books of poetry. I picked one up the other day called *Idle Kings*, or something like that, and I can't think why Miss Plowden lets her. All about knights and love and soppy girls!"

"Now, look here, Charlie," said Janet firmly. "You can't always keep Marigold a child. She has to grow up and take her choice of being a withered spinster like Rachel, or a wife and mother. It's only fair. Why should she be denied a home and children, because she lives on an island where most of the women hate men? The exception, not the rule, people with an unlucky past. If she can't meet men she must read of them, or when she's twenty-one she'll probably fall in love with some wrong 'un, who is after her money. Has that occurred to you?"

"Mrs. Mappin would soon send him flying!" Charlie said scornfully. "What really worries me is this war that's coming. If it's as long as the last she'll be whipped in. A land girl, or worse! I wake up at night all of a sweat

dreaming of it." Charlie's face worked. "If any man got fooling round her I'd wring his neck! But I mightn't be there."

"Well, comfort yourself," said Janet kindly. "She's safe for two years, and much may happen before then. But be careful what you say. Marigold feels restricted already, wants to go to Muss, but Mrs. Mappin won't allow it."

"She's afraid of the airmen." Charlie scowled. "And a hot lot they are! I don't like them landing on the Ram. It's too near; they might see her."

"How could they?"

"The fisherman saw Polly," Charlie said shrewdly.

"Because she wanted him to. Polly was fifteen when she came here and he wasn't the first man she'd met. I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill, and the best thing you can do is to keep the child amused. Why don't you teach her carpentering? It's a useful thing to know."

"I might." Charlie brightened. "Well, thank you, Dr. Janet. I'm a fool, I suppose, but I've known her so long. In a way, she's my baby."

"And does you credit!" Janet laughed, for she saw the other was embarrassed by her confession. "What about those shelves?"

"Lor', I must go or I'll get it in the neck! The sprats will save you cooking each morning, and there's enough stores to feed an army." At the door she turned, grinning. "They're ticked off the list!"

Janet smiled as the latch clicked. It was so like Sybil to do this carefully, and give Mrs. Brown a free hand. Charlie's "gift" would not be missed, was possibly an excuse for unburdening her soul. It was strange that scorning marriage she should speak of Marigold as her baby. There was no escape from sex.

Dinner found the community exhausted, to include Mrs. Mappin, who rejected Janet's advice to rest. The stores must be finished to-day. Clouds were drifting across the hot sky, but Polly declared it wouldn't rain, no more than a shower. When the meal was over Madame Ducroy drew Marigold into the garden. She, alone, had mysteriously vanished that morning, explaining later to Mrs. Mappin that making her bed she had found a hole in a sheet and had carefully mended it. "Zen anozzer!" Sybil had

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looked sceptical; that was Rachel's work. Now Marigold asked her friend what she had been up to.

"I tell you. I 'ave ze 'appy idea wiz my combinations. Zey are of ze most impropaire! So I cut zem off at ze waist, sew zem up and put *valenciennes* on ze bottoms. To make warm kickers, but careful not to show!"

Marigold laughed, and glanced behind them, afraid of Ruth.

"What did you do with the tops?"

"Ah, zat was a problaim." Solange gave her a brilliant smile. "*Enfin*, I make little squares to wash my face. But I put an impropaire one on ze top of ze drawer, in case zat leetle *bossue* look. I find 'er in my room yesterday reading a letter, but 'appily it is in French, and I tell 'er it is *malhonnête*. She say she find it in ze passage and weesh to return to ze owner, but zat is not true. You be careful of 'er."

"She isn't allowed in our suite, and I never get letters." If only she could! "But I'm sorry, Solange. Shall I speak to Rachel about it?"

"No, no! I weesh no trouble. I 'ave enough!" She sighed. "My bruzzer, Pierre, return to France. 'E will fight, and 'ow do I know what 'appen? In zis isle so far away."

"Oh, poor you!" Marigold exclaimed. "But if war comes I expect we shall go for the post more often." How strange it was that the brother's name was so like that of Piers. It seemed to draw them closer, and she tried to console her companion. "He will feel happier about you here than if you were in London. What is it?"

"A beeg drop of rain! One must run!"

Out in all weathers, the girl smiled, but hastened her steps to suit Madame Ducroy's. In the hall they were met by Miss Plowden, who told Marigold she must rest. Lie on her bed and read, she suggested.

"It's so dark there this weather. I know! I'll go up the tower. Ruth won't find me there." She smiled at Miss Plowden. "So keep it a secret!"

"I will, my dear, and I'll come up and tell you when it's tea-time, as you mayn't hear the gong."

"Sweet of you!"

Obeying a sudden impulse Marigold kissed her. What would the governess say if she knew? Nothing, if the

marriage on the Ram were legal. It must be. Marigold cast off the doubt, and armed with a cushion, the New Testament slipped into the cover, mounted the winding stairs to what she called the "look-out post." She opened the door, and halted. Anna was there, standing before her easel, painting.

"Do you mind?" the girl asked. "I was going to read and I wouldn't talk, but if you'd rather——"

"No, come in, my dear. I'm only finishing off something I did last night. Have a look at it."

Marigold advanced, to gaze at the nebulous vision of white cottages rising from the sea, against the hills and moonlit sky.

"However did you do it?" she gasped. "Go out in the launch?"

"No, from this window. A queer trick of the light. There were dark clouds over the water and they brought the shore closer, everything net under the moon. I'd never seen it like this before, but Solange did and fetched me. I was painting here for hours, but don't tell anyone."

"Of course I won't! It looks like a fairy-tale."

"It was lovely, all alone in the stillness. I felt I'd escaped from the island." Regretting her candour, she added, "Although I'm very happy here."

"I wish I could paint." Marigold's face was wistful. "I'm so sick of doing nothing! But I'm not going to disturb you."

Anna would not ask what she was reading, absorbed in her work, and Marigold settled down in an old deck-chair, the cushion behind her head and the Testament on her knee. Another parable? She remembered that Lawrence of Arabia had used the same medium with his desert companions. The East did not seem to change. Nearly two thousand years ago, yet Christ's life was as vivid as if the gospel had been written yesterday.

Time slipped past, and a gleam of sunshine succeeded the rain as she turned the thin pages. Suddenly, Anna looked round and listened.

"Who's that calling up the stairs for you? I believe it's that little pest! Don't let her in, or she'll be messing with my paints!"

Struggling up, Marigold made for the door and peered down.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"I'm here! What do you want?"

"I've been looking for you everywhere," Ruth panted from below. "Mrs. Mappin sent me to find you."

"Then go down and tell her I'm coming."

"But what are you doing up there?"

"Trying to have a little peace!"

"Are you alone?"

The clumping steps were mounting, and Anna gesticulated wildly.

"If you don't go down at once mother will be cross with you." Marigold waited. "That's done it!" She picked up her cushion, and hid Piers's gift. "Sickening, isn't it?"

"Yes. I've finished, but I'm sorry for you, my angel. Let's have another quiet afternoon together? If you can muzzle the pest!"

Smiling at Anna's expression, Marigold made her way downstairs, reaching Ruth on the last flight.

"I don't like you," the hunchback muttered. "You ought to be kind to me. I shall tell Rachel how you drove me away!" Her beady eyes were malicious. "I believe you go up the tower to look for some man! Like Polly."

Disgusted, Marigold passed her and felt a sharp kick on her ankle. She whirled round.

"If you do that again I shall shake you!"

"I slipped," said Ruth. "And you daren't touch me! I'd go straight to Dr. Janet. But you're going to catch it. *You'll see!*"

What was the matter now? Marigold tapped at her mother's door and entered. The sun in the west was dazzling, and all she could make out was the massive figure against the light.

"Oh, there you are," Mrs. Mappin began, in a hard voice. "Where have you been?"

"In the tower, reading. Until Ruth said you wanted me."

"Yes. You wouldn't come near me otherwise, although I've had a tiring day."

"I thought you were still at the stores. Miss Plowden sent me off to rest."

"So delicate," Sybil mocked. "I hope you're not growing hysterical? You've not enough to do, that's the reason. But I didn't send for you to discuss your health."



I want to know this: have you been wearing my winter coat?"

Marigold, stunned, followed her glance. There it lay, over an arm-chair, bringing back a vision of Piers fastening the safety-pins.

"No," she gulped. "Why?"

"Are you certain?"

"Yes, mother."

"Then how did these get here?" Her hand went down into a deep pocket and produced two crumpled bows. "Your ribbons, I think?"

An awful moment. Dumb, the girl nodded, remembering how Piers had rescued them, then undone a plait, to play with the bright hair as they lay in the heather.

"I must have put them there and forgotten," she forced herself to say. Hateful to tell half-lies, but what could she do? "I shook everything in that cupboard when I turned out your room. It doesn't matter, does it? They couldn't hurt?"

Mrs. Mappin looked at her daughter's flushed cheeks.

"I don't believe you are speaking the truth. I've told you before not to borrow my clothes. I won't have it!" Her voice was sharp with temper. "I've put on the coat and it's out of shape!"

"But I'm not as big as you."

An unfortunate remark, for Sybil was sensitive over her size.

"Don't be impertinent!" A new thought struck her. "What were you doing in the tower?"

"I've told you, mother, reading."

"Alone?"

"No. Anna was there, painting."

"The sea—in the *rain*?" Mrs. Mappin asked sardonically.

"Only touching up an earlier picture of the shore."

"And how did she get it?"

"From the tower window," Marigold faltered, with a queer sensation. Was she going to faint?

"That's a lie! She couldn't see it."

"Well, ask her," the girl brought out.

"Don't speak to me like that! You're a bad daughter," Sybil shouted. "I've sacrificed my life to you, and this is my reward! You will go to your room and stay there!"

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Neither had heard a tap at the door. Janet, looking disturbed, came in.

"Whatever's the matter?"

"Marigold! Deceiving me, and shielding Anna! Saying she painted a picture of the village from the tower! Another breach of the rules, I suppose?"

"No, it's true," Janet said quietly, her eyes on Sybil's purple face, a fleck of froth on the lips. "Don't be too hasty, my dear. I met Anna just now carrying the picture. She painted it last evening, by moonlight, a curious effect like a mirage." Here the gong rang out, and Janet turned to Marigold, white and shaken. "You'd better go to tea, hadn't you?"

"If mother let's me?"

"Of course she does. Mrs. Brown doesn't like you to be late."

Darling Aunt Janet, the girl thought, always so just. How dreadful mother was in one of her rages! Must put the Testament back in the secret drawer. If she saw that it would be the end!

When she reached the kitchen Miss Plowden asked:

"Did you have a nice read?"

"At first, then Ruth hunted me out. Mother wanted me."

Another scene, the governess guessed, and made her drink a hot cup of tea to bring the colour back into her cheeks. When the meal was over she suggested a walk, adding:

"It's nice and bright now."

Ruth, who had been watching the pair, regretting the kick, joined them.

"Going out? I'll come with you."

"Not this time," Miss Plowden said pleasantly. "We want to be alone."

"Why?" The hunchback remembered Sybil's face. "What has Marigold *done*?"

"I will tell you, Ruth. She has grown tired of a woman of your age who can never take a hint. That is your great fault, my dear, so think it over."

Baffled, the hunchback scowled, and watched them go.

"Splendid!" Marigold broke out when they were alone. "I'm sorry for her, but there's a limit!" They were passing the power-house and carpenter's shop and she told Miss

Plowden of Charlie's suggestion. "I'll make a book-shelf for you."

"I should like that. A good idea." Miss Plowden, hearing steps, glanced behind her. "Here's Amy now! We'll take the short cut through the heather and dodge up into the wood. She'll be afraid of getting her feet wet!"

"Rather!" Presently, the girl looked back to see Amy hesitate at the turning. "I can understand how people wrecked on a desert island get to hate each other. She's coming!"

They felt safe when they reached the pool and hurried into the shade of the trees. At the edge of the warren they halted, breathless.

"If you promise to keep it a secret I'll show you a hiding-place of mine," Marigold volunteered. "I don't mind your using it, if nobody sees you. This way!"

"At the farm above?"

"No, on the cliff." Scrambling up the bank, the girl turned to the right, and pointed. "Behind that tree near the edge. See how it's bent by the wind?"

"Yes, a good screen." When they reached it Miss Plowden said: "This is new ground to me. Clever of you to find it, but I'm not going to trespass on your preserves!"

"I invited you! Come and look at the view." They gazed over the shining water at the headland beyond, which broke the westerly gales. "Do you know what I'd like? To see a big ship sail in, and lower a boat to take me round the world!"

"A very troubled world," Miss Plowden reminded her, watching from their narrow platform the curling crests of the waves. "You will have to wait, my dear. I only hope beautiful cities may not be destroyed, such as Rome and Florence. I don't trust Mussolini."

"But wouldn't the Pope look after Rome?" Marigold asked, and smiled. "Now that he's a ticket-of-leave man!"

"You mustn't say that," Miss Plowden corrected. "He is the head of what Roman Catholics call the 'Old Faith,' a good man and deserves respect. Although, since the Reformation we hold that ours is still older, the simple one preached by our Lord, and practised by the early Church." She noticed the girl's interest, but changed the subject. "Let us go on with our walk. It's too damp to stand about."

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She did not want to tell Marigold yet of Mrs. Mappin's dispensation; time enough when the holidays ended. But the very next day, unwittingly, the girl forced her hand.

She had been missing since dinner, and failed to appear at tea. At last Miss Plowden went in search of her, and remembered the hiding-place. The weather was fine, with fleecy clouds drifting over the blue sky, and dappled water that broke gently against the cliff. Nearing the lone tree she heard muffled sobs and quickened her steps. There lay the girl, her golden head on her arms, shaken by grief.

"My dear child, what is the matter?" the governess asked, bending down. Her foot touched a slim leather-bound volume and she saw, to her amazement, that it was a New Testament. "You mustn't cry like this."

"I can't help it!" Marigold lifted a tear-stained face. "It's so *cruel*! The way they killed Jesus! I was hoping up to the end that the old God would come down and save him."

Miss Plowden's lips parted in protest, then she changed her mind. Let her explain in her own way.

"They drove nails through his hands and feet—think of that!" Marigold wailed. "After all He had done, healing the sick and bringing sight to the blind, and always so sweet to little children! They beat and mocked Him and put a crown of thorns on His head! Why wasn't it stopped?" she asked fiercely.

"Because He died to save us, and bring the wonderful news of the Resurrection. Surely you knew that our Lord was crucified?"

"In a way—the Cross in old pictures—but I didn't take it in. Except as a legend, like those of Ancient Greece. Not until——"

She paused, looking scared, her eyes fixed on the precious volume. Miss Plowden, watching her, reached a conclusion.

"I'm not going to ask who lent you that, though it wouldn't get her into trouble now. Your mother told me yesterday that I might give you scripture lessons."

"No?" Marigold wriggled up, relieved. "I'm glad! There's such heaps of things I want to ask you. About Peter, for instance. I'm sure I've read somewhere that he was the first Pope. Yet he denied Jesus?"

"And was forgiven when he repented bitterly. Which gospel have you been reading?"

"'According to St. Matthew.' But I haven't finished it, not the last chapter—I couldn't!" The girl found her handkerchief and wiped her eyes. "I expect you think me silly, but it's all so *real*, and I'd got so fond of Jesus, so tender to everyone in trouble. I shall always hate the Jews!"

"Yet He forgave them, as you'll find in another gospel, and pleaded with His Father for them." She looked at the young, perplexed face. "Do you know the legend of the robin that tried to pluck out the thorns in Christ's brow and pierced its own breast? Ever since then it has been red from His blood."

"How sweet! Even the birds loved Him. I shall remember that." Absently, the girl picked up the New Testament and tucked it down inside her dress. "Tell me some more?"

"Not now," said Miss Plowden. "You've had no tea, so we'll go up to the farm and ask for a glass of milk. Then after that I think you must read the last chapter, where Christ appears and talks to His disciples. It may comfort you."

"Talks?" Marigold fell into step by her governess. "After He'd been killed?"

"Yes, my dear. He had told them that when three days had passed He would rise again, as a proof that all those who believe in Him should inherit eternal life."

"Do we?" A faint smile touched the girl's lips. "I didn't believe Cousin Selina, because she didn't know where we went! But I've always hated the idea of death, that it's bound to come." To Piers as well, with the added hazards of war, and she added wistfully, "It's nice to feel we go on."

"Through Christ," Miss Plowden murmured. "Who died for our sins."

After a pause Marigold said:

"That doesn't seem fair."

"A sacrifice of love."

Miss Plowden let this sink in as they mounted the path, her mind at work. Was it possible, despite her motive, that Mrs. Mappin had been wise in letting the girl come fresh to the everlasting story, undimmed by repetition? She felt her own responsibility. The "old God"? How could she explain the mystery of the Trinity, which had

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baffled so many cleverer brains? Better leave all dogma alone; as a child Marigold was entering the Kingdom. At this moment the girl asked:

"Is the Deaconess a Pharisee? They were always showing off! Oh, what are phallackeries, broad ones?" She listened, Miss Plowden hiding her amusement. "All for forms and ceremonies? But Cousin Selina doesn't practise what she preaches. She hates her brother!"

"A human weakness," the governess compromised. "Wrong, of course, since God is love."

Then He must approve of her loving Piers, her pupil reasoned. A doubt succeeded. Loving him too well? Not if they were married. Was it adultery if you weren't? She frowned, opening the farm gate.

Mrs. Gee greeted them, and looked at Marigold's reddened eyelids, then enquiringly at Miss Plowden, who smiled and conveyed by a glance that it was nothing. Mrs. Mappin again, the farmer decided, and buttered a scone to go with the milk, then led them off to admire the new litter. The little pigs were amusing, but as soon as they turned their steps to the Pirate's Rock Marigold asked:

"Wasn't it queer, those swine rushing into the sea? Did the devils drown, too? You'd have thought they wouldn't like it." To Miss Plowden's relief she ran on, "It must have been a wonderful sight when Jesus walked on the water, and Peter tried to and nearly sank. Then 'the wind ceased.'" She was to remember the words when the news of Dunkirk came through. "It's such beautiful language. Can we sit down here? I want to read the last chapter."

She did so, in the glory of the sunset, reflected by the flush in her cheeks when she came to the last words, for Piers had marked them.

"Is Jesus *really* with us now?" she asked in an awed voice.

"That was His promise to man. You have only to pray and He will hear."

"But I don't know any prayers. Could one just ask for something—something one wants very badly?"

"Of course, my child. In your own language."

Miss Plowden saw the full lids droop, hiding the girl's eyes as, unconsciously, she lifted her face to the sky. Little did the governess guess that this first prayer was for a

lover: "Oh, Jesus, please take care of Piers. Hold him up safe in the air, as you did Peter on the water."

Peter—Piers? The same name. That might help Jesus to remember.

"I've done," she said, opening her eyes. "Those puffins are all asleep. I can't get over Robin Redbreast. It couldn't have been instinct, Miss Plowden. He knew . . ."

Even with this fresh and absorbing interest the next two days dragged for the girl, waiting for *The Times*. At moments a feeling of guilt oppressed her. Earlier, it had been centred on the fact that she was deceiving her mother, but Miss Plowden had pointed out that forgiveness of sins depended on the sinner's repentance—and she didn't "repent"! If Piers came to-night she would give herself to him again. It wasn't a sin when the lower creation made love, so why should it be for the higher? Reasoning it out she decided that it was because of the children. Kings had mistresses and offspring, but the latter were secretly despised, even when created Dukes, and could not inherit the throne. That was it! Children must have their rights, and supposing—— She shut off the thought.

On Wednesday she stole out early to look at the sea. Quite calm, so mother would go to Muss. She rarely woke before Mrs. Brown appeared with the morning tea. A good time to write another letter to Piers, to wait for a chance of posting it. Marigold covered four pages and put them in an envelope with the address he had given her, leaving it open until she would receive his message. At the swimming pool she found Charlie, who greeted her boisterously.

"Up with the early worm? So am I. Yer mother wants to start soon after breakfast. Anna's going too, poor devil! If there's one thing I bar it's having a tooth out. Watch now!" She dived backwards, and cut the water cleanly. "That's the way to do it," she spluttered. "Hurry up! I've a bit of news for you."

When Marigold joined her she explained.

"The Deaconess has to water the garden this morning! No getting out of it. She said it was 'wrong' to hide the stores, and yer mother blew up! So would I, considering the twist she's got! Our Imy is going to help, with I-reen

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in charge, and Ruth to give advice. Sure to be a row! You keep your ears open and tell me. Race you twice round the pool to that post."

Marigold won, and presently, they lay on the sunburnt grass facing the dressing-shed.

"Do you like Irene?" the girl asked.

"I don't know her. S'trewth! She's been here nearly as long as I have"—Charlie frowned—"but one gets no furrderer! Close as an oyster. Not a bad sort, but there you are. I don't even know why she came here. Some *man*, I expect."

"But she isn't even pretty?"

"That doesn't matter in the dark." Charlie was thinking of her own experience, and pulled herself up, not fit for the kid. "I've something more to tell you. Ruth was helping our Imy make her bed, and caught a flea in it! The result, blackmail! I was passing the door on my way to Anna's room for her sketch-book, to smuggle it into the launch, and I heard Imy say, 'You won't tell anyone? I'll see if I have a shilling.'" Charlie gufawed. "So Ruth's got Imy where she wants her!"

This was apparent at breakfast. The hunchback had returned to her old seat by the schoolteacher's side, to Marigold's relief. The Deaconess scooped up the last poached egg in the dish, a second helping, and remarked blandly:

"The hens are laying well. Dear me, I hope no one else wanted this?"

Miss Plowden murmured something polite, and in the short silence that followed Ruth announced:

"I wouldn't keep fowls if I was paid!"

"Why not, darling?" Rachel enquired fondly.

"Because they're dirty things. Full of fleas!" Her eyes turned to Amy. "Would you?"

Marigold giggled, for Charlie had winked.

"What's the joke?" Amy asked suspiciously.

"I know!" sniggered Ruth. "But I'm not going to tell tales out of school." A pause. "Going up the tower again?" she asked Marigold.

Surprised, the girl flushed, for this had been her intention, to watch for the return of the launch.

"I might. If you don't come trailing after me!"

"Really, Marigold," the Deaconess reprov'd. "That is.



not the way to speak to Ruth. I thought you were coming to help in the garden?"

The silent Irene looked up.

"Three's enough," she ordained. "You'll have to look out, Deaconess, as that water-butt leaks."

"Aren't we going to have the hose?"

"No, I don't want everything dashed. Cans are much better." Into the stolid face came a fleeting gleam of amusement. "I'll show you what to do."

"Thanks, but I understand gardening," the Deaconess said loftily.

"Then you'll know we ought to start before the sun comes round." Irene looked at the clock and rose. "You'll excuse us, Miss Plowden?"

"Of course. Good luck to the watering party!"

They trailed out, the Deaconess first, Ruth holding Amy's hand.

As soon as the door closed Anna began to laugh.

"I wish I weren't going to Muss!"

But already, Mrs. Mappin, armed with her list, was taking the letters out of the box in the hall, to glance at each in turn and slip them into her despatch case. How devoted Madame Ducroy was to her brother, writing to him every week. Here was one in Anna's hand to her agent. Sybil frowned. Another to Michael Chaytor, from Janet? Well, that was safe enough! She turned her head as Charlie appeared.

"Good morning! You can bring the launch round. Where's Anna?"

There was the usual fuss of departure, then silence fell on the Castle, to be broken by Mrs. Brown wielding a vacuum sweeper in Sybil's room. Marigold stole up into the tower, and watched the launch vanish from sight. It was no good staying here for two hours at least and, restless, she went down and out through her door to the one in the wall. She could hear a plaintive voice in the kitchen garden:

"I'm wet through! Look at my ankles!"

Then Irene's stolid accents:

"You'd lift the can out better if you took off those gloves. Keep it low and *soak* the ground. Sprinkling's no good."

"But it's making my back ache. Oh, Amy, you splashed me!"

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"I'm sorry, Deaconess." Then, fiercely: "Get out of my way!"

"It's only a little frog." Ruth, this time. "It hopped! Just like a flea." A giggle. "Oh, look at that huge thing coming out! I believe it's a snake!"

"Where? Irene! *Help!*"

There came the rattle of a dropped can and Marigold, doubled up with laughter, caught the gardener's disgusted comment:

"Only a worm! Now you've trodden on the parsley." A mutter: "Doing more harm than good."

"I think you might be grateful, Irene. This is really *your* work." Then, shrilly, "Oh! I believe I've been stung by a wasp! It's round my head—drive it off, Amy, quick!"

"It's gone, dear."

A try on, Marigold thought, and was not surprised when the Deaconess said coldly:

"You go on with the carrots. I'll manage these."

Silence descended on the watering party. A thrush sang in the orchard, and leaning against the wall Marigold listened. To-morrow, if the weather held, the hay would be cut in the lower field as soon as it was light, everyone busy, Mrs. Gee ensconced in the kitchen to make jugs of tea and bring them out with the cinnamon buns, reminding her of her Devonshire girlhood. As a rule, Marigold enjoyed hay-making, but now everything depended on what would be in *The Times*. Voices broke out again. She had heard enough to amuse Charlie, and she went back to her room. The clock seemed to have stopped. No, it was ticking away the slow minutes. She drew out her ribbon drawer and went through her treasures, the two crumpled bows on the top. Dreaming, she conjured up the night when Piers had confessed that he loved her. Was he thinking of her now, waiting to receive his message? She could bear it no longer; up she went to watch for the launch.

Her eyes were strained by the glare on the sea when at last she saw the silver speck. Slowly it lengthened, drew nearer and revealed its shape, like a bird with folded wings skimming the water. Marigold waited until Charlie took the curve to the jetty, then out she ran and down the stairs. Mustn't show she was excited. She peeped into the library, and waited there until she heard the creak of the heavy

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door below and her mother's step ascending. In the hall she mustered a smile.

"You're back?" she greeted her parent.

"Yes. Take these," Mrs. Mappin panted, and thrust out the roll of newspapers. "I must see Mrs. Brown. So tiresome! The salt beef wasn't ready and I've had to bring mutton again."

She turned to the left, Marigold to the right, resisting an impulse to run. Inside the large room she laid the pile on a table, for Sybil liked to go through it first. Here was Tuesday's *Times*, on the top. The girl's eyes ran down the Personal Column. G! Her heart thudding, she read:

"Perfectly legal. Ask my wife to write to me. Take care of your little self. B.-M."

## PART THREE

### CHAPTER XI

A WET sea fog blotted out what light there was at the early hour when Marigold took the short cut to Janet's cottage. The island was silent, for most of the birds had migrated. The ling, at its best in September, was over, and the only bright note of autumn belonged to the rowans, where the red leaves vied with clusters of berries. Marigold moved like a wraith, shrouded in her dark cape, the hood drawn over her hair. She was dreading the confession before her, but determined to screen Piers. The community could beat her, but they could not make her divulge his name. Sacrifice was the test of love, and now he was fighting for his country he must be spared all anxiety and disgrace. His joy when he received her two letters had filled the next messages in *The Times*, the first posted by Jean when she came to examine the black-out. Marigold had complained of her gas-mask being too loose, and had secured a few minutes alone with the red-haired woman, secretly disappointed when she found the missive addressed to one of her own sex. An old nurse, Marigold had explained. A few weeks later she had cut her right thumb during a carpentering lesson and, returning to her room with her handkerchief wound round it, had seen Solange, writing in the library, alone. The excuse was too good to miss and she had asked her friend to address an envelope, in her fine, pointed hand, and slipped the letter into the hall box. Now she was praying that some inspector might call and that she could take him to the farm. He would think her request perfectly natural. If only she could have a reply! But it seemed impossible, and she had to be contented with the few lines in print, which assured her Piers was safe. In one he had said: "Detained here." This must mean that his leave was postponed, in the flurry of war. But now she could wait no longer.

The white blur of the cottage when she reached the

upper path brought the girl to a halt in a sudden panic. Closing her eyes, hands folded, she sent up a prayer for help, remembering the Saviour's great sacrifice for the world He loved. Courage came to her, for Jesus was near. She might in her small way be scourged and mocked, but she need feel no shame, a married woman. For long she had debated the question of admitting this, but no one would believe her unless she told the whole story, and this would involve Piers. Her mother would certainly suspect an airman and make extensive enquiries, probably visit the aerodrome. Then all might come out. Lose his wings? Never!

Moving forward again, she came to the door, tapped, and was told to enter. The fire in the range was lit, and Janet was putting on a kettle.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, turning her head. "In this weather?"

"I wanted to catch you before you started work."

"Then come and sit down." Janet drew two chairs to the welcome glow. "Is anything wrong?" she asked as the girl threw back her hood, her face set and white. "Not your mother?"

"No, she's asleep. It's about myself." Marigold drew a deep breath. "I think I'm going to have a baby."

Janet stared at her. Whatever had the child got into her head?

"That's impossible!" she said briskly. "You haven't been off the island, and no man can land, except at the jetty."

"But one has. It was when mother was away." Conscious of Janet's shocked attention, Marigold slipped off her cape. "It was so hot in my room with the door shut that I went down to sleep in the hammock. That's where he found me, and we fell in love with each other."

Janet felt a cold hand on her heart. This would kill Sybil, if it were true. Her eyes ran over the old knitted jumper, once loose, now clinging to the rounded breasts. Sybil had left on the eve of Marigold's birthday and this was the middle of October. More than three months ago?

"I can't believe it! How did this man get in?" Janet asked sternly.

"He swam from that little island they call the Ram,

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and climbed over the barrier. It's quite easy, really, if you look out for rocks." Something in Janet's expression stung the girl's pride and her head went up. "We were engaged."

"And he couldn't even respect you?" A memory stirred. "One of those airmen Charlie was talking about? You must tell me, Marigold."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Janet, but I can't." The set of her chin reminded the other of Sybil. "I'm not going to tell anyone who he is."

"You will have to, if only for the sake of the child. But first, we had better be sure of that." Janet rose. "Come to my bedroom."

She was the doctor now, calm and efficient, though inwardly aghast. She led the way, and Marigold followed, mustering her courage. Ten minutes later they were back in the kitchen, where the kettle was steaming. Janet lifted it and warmed the tea-pot, lost in painful certainty. At last she turned and faced the girl.

"There's nothing to be done. You'll have to go through it."

"But I want to! If it weren't for mother I should be frightfully pleased." Her golden eyes shone as she looked straight into Janet's grey ones. "Fancy having a baby of my own! The only thing is, they won't beat me, will they? I don't mind, much, for myself, but they mustn't hurt the child."

"I'll see to that. Sit down." In the opposite chair, Janet began, "What I can't forgive is your doing this, Marigold. You knew it was wrong."

"Not really." A slip, and she covered it with, "I mean if you love anyone very much. He was going away and I wanted to belong to him. Then I was certain he'd come back."

That old, hopeless argument, Janet thought.

"And supposing he doesn't?" she asked.

"I'm not afraid of that!" The colour rising in her cheeks, Marigold smiled proudly. "You don't understand, Aunt Janet. I'm everything in the world to him. You should see the lovely things he gave me!"

"An engagement ring?" Janet asked shrewdly, her eyes on the girl's bare hand.

"No, he couldn't find one good enough at Muss, so he

brought me a string of pearls. And ribbons, and *silk* stockings, a brooch, and the last night a New Testament."

"What?" was jerked from Janet's lips. It didn't sound like a gay young airman!

"Bound in Russia leather, with passages marked. They've been such a comfort to me! Miss Plowden thinks I borrowed it—she's giving me scripture lessons—but it was really from——" The girl paused, frowning. "Let's call him 'Peter'? That isn't his name, but it makes things easier. Isn't the Bible wonderful? Do you remember how Jesus forgave the woman taken in sin? Not that I am, exactly, but I'm saving it up for Cousin Selina, who is sure to preach—although she hates her brother! But everyone here hates men, and I'm so sick of it! When they're really good," she said earnestly. "P—Peter is, and I don't feel it was wrong, except for deceiving mother."

"A convenient conscience," Janet remarked dryly, and proceeded to make tea, for the girl was looking pale again. "You'd better have a cup."

"I don't think I'll risk it. I was so sick this morning! I was afraid mother would hear me, so I screwed myself up to come to you. How am I going to tell her, Aunt Janet?"

"You must leave that to me." Her heart sank at the prospect. Marigold looked relieved and, what was more puzzling, unashamed. It had been the same upstairs under Janet's medical questions. "I don't know what will be the result," she went on. "Your mother is in very poor health. You should have thought of that before you embarked on this mad affair."

"But Peter comes first. She's never loved me like he does, and I needn't stay here. If there's trouble I can go to his—people. They know we're engaged. I do hope it will be a boy!"

Over the rim of her teacup Janet's eyes narrowed. Property? Anyhow, a "string of pearls" didn't sound poor.

"Can this Peter afford to keep you?"

"Rather!"

"Then he isn't a fisherman?"

Just in time Marigold saw the trap.

"Of course not! If you met him you'd like him."

"I certainly shouldn't. I know his type." Janet added

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scathingly, "He could see you were only a child, more shame to him!"

"You're not to talk like that!" Marigold flared out. "It was *my* fault!" Since Janet looked sceptical, her cheeks scarlet, she confessed. "You see when we came in from swimming and went to the dressing-room I—I stripped, and that finished him! He was frightfully worried afterwards, even before he went away at dawn, said he'd cut his throat if anything happened, though I didn't believe it would."

At dawn? No wonder the girl had looked tired, with dark shadows under her eyes! And all this had been going on whilst Janet was in charge of the island. Stripped? That lovely young body—poor lad! Janet's sense of justice stirred. But the cruel part was that the punishment would fall on Marigold's shoulders. She warned the girl of this, and of what she must expect from the community.

"I know, but I don't care. Charlie and Solange will stick to me, and Miss Plowden in the end, if they're too beastly. As to Cousin Selina, when she starts throwing texts at my head I can throw some back! About the Pharisees! Here's Polly with the pram."

There came a tap at the door, and she appeared.

"I'm sorry to be late, Dr. Janet, but ma made me come the long way, afraid of the fog on the cliff. Oh, you've got some milk?"

"A little I boiled last night, but we can have breakfast now. Marigold is staying, so will you ask Mrs. Brown to tell Miss Plowden? You understand?"

"Yes, staying for breakfast," Polly repeated.

"Take care how you go," Janet warned her.

"I promised ma I'd go up through the garden. Good-bye, all!"

The door closed, Marigold beaming.

"You *are* sweet to me, Aunt Janet! I'd love to stay, and I feel rather hungry now. May I cook?"

"Only sardines or eggs. Which would you like?"

"Eggs, I think." The milk bottle in one hand, the girl threw her other arm round Janet and hugged her. "I knew you'd dress me down, and then understand, because of being fond of Michael Chaytor."

"Whatever put that into your head?" Janet gasped.

"We're only friends."



"You can't deceive me," said Marigold wisely. "All the letters he writes, and meeting you when you go to town. What a shame you can't be married and live here!" Her face became wistful. "It's dreadful not to get letters from Peter, but mother would open them at once." Standing by Janet's chair, the girl looked down at her gravely. "So different from mothers in books, who want their daughters to marry and be happy. I know this will be a blow to her, but she doesn't really care for me, always finding fault. Peter does. He saw her photo on my mantelpiece, and——"

"Did he come to your room?" Janet interrupted, with a fresh sense of shock.

"The last night. It was too wet for the wood, so we risked it. I don't mean—he was ever so careful—you understand?" She smiled serenely. "Though rather late for that? But I'm glad now. I've wanted a baby ever since Solange showed me hers, and mother can't stop me having one."

"Unfortunately," Janet murmured. Was it true what Michael declared, the world changing so quickly that their generation could not keep up with the new one? "Well," she said abruptly. "You'd better cook the eggs if you want to."

Laying the table, she watched the girl come and go, and tried the effect of a sudden question:

"Where is this man of yours?"

"I don't know. That's the worst of it! The only address he's allowed to give is care of the G.P.O."

"He's in one of the Services, then?"

"Like everyone else."

"What age is he?"

"Twenty-two."

"Did he know yours when you first met?"

"Not exactly." Marigold hesitated. "I didn't tell him it was my birthday, and somehow, he thought I was nearly eighteen."

Janet nodded. Wanted to appear grown-up!

"And you write to him? Who takes your letters to Muss?"

Lifting the poached eggs out of the pan Marigold was silent.

"Charlie, I suppose?"

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"No!" She must stop this. "There have only been two. I asked Jean to post one when she tried on my gas-mask, but it wasn't addressed to P-Peter, so it's no good your questioning her. The other time I'd cut my thumb, and I asked—someone to write the envelope. She had no suspicion, and I'd sooner not say who it was. Mother looks at every letter in the box, even yours, and she'd know my hand at once."

Janet frowned; it was true, a habit she deplored.

"You'll be able to write to Peter openly now. You must, unless——" She broke off. "Does he know about the child?"

"Of course not!" Marigold's eyes opened wide. "When he's on active service?"

"But he must. He'll have to get compassionate leave and marry you."

"I won't have him worried." Marigold's face was averted, but a dimple in her cheek betrayed her. She brought the eggs to the table, looking demure. "I know what you're thinking, Aunt Janet. 'Soldier, sailor'—certainly not a 'candlestick-maker'! Oh dear, it's nice to laugh! I was terrified coming here. So I prayed, and I felt better."

Janet gave it up. Time enough when Sybil knew. But how on earth was she to tell her?

During the simple meal Marigold yielded to her longing to talk of her lover. How he had worn Cousin Selina's sandals—so funny! And danced in the blue kimono—a giggle when she came to the "step-ins"—then their feast in the wood. Such children, Janet thought. After hearing the artless story she no longer believed that the seduction had been planned. The man had lost his head, and looking at the girl she was not surprised. About her still hung a curious air of innocence, and when she said, "You don't how how heavenly it was to talk to someone young!" Janet realised, only too clearly, Sybil's mistake. On the island of hate love had stolen in, defeating the mother's plan against nature.

Janet's own duty was plain: to mitigate the blow as well as she could, and guard Marigold against Sybil's ungovernable temper. It wouldn't be easy, and she was glad when the girl looked at the clock and cried:

"I must go! Or I shall be late for lessons."

"Yes." Janet rose and fetched the cape. "You quite understand? I shall talk to your mother over tea when everyone will be in the kitchen, so keep out of the way."

"I will." Marigold paused on the threshold. "She'll be frightfully angry! It doesn't seem fair it should fall on you. I've a great mind to tell her myself."

"No. I can't allow that. But if I have to send for you be quiet and don't answer back."

"I'll be good." Marigold smiled. "I promise, Aunt Janet."

Thankful to be alone, the latter gave herself up to gloomy thought. It wouldn't be the first time that she had broken such news to a mother with an erring daughter, but she dreaded the effect of the shock. How could she open the subject? She wished suddenly that Michael were here to advise her, with his brilliant imagination. Was she losing her self-confidence as the years passed on? The thought stung, and piling up the tray she carried it into the scullery and began to wash up. It might be partly due to the insecurity bred by war, although on the island it seemed far away. Since the first excitement and the news that the B.E.F. had safely reached France there had been an unexpected lull, with little fighting, and no air-raids on London; then general disgust over Russia's invasion of Poland, followed by an agreement with Germany. This had affected Amy the most, no longer able to start a diatribe against her own country with the words: "*In Russia, now—*" Mrs. Mappin had been busy coping with registration papers and had returned from a weary-some morning at Muss to find the Deaconess up in arms. Was it true that no arrangements had been made for the community to attend Morning Service on the Day of National Prayer? Sybil had flown into one of her rages. Selina was not the mistress of the Castle; an unwarrantable impertinence to insist in this fashion! The launch would go in for Early Service on October the 1st, and that was sufficient. Half an hour later the Deaconess had called at the cottage to pour out her wrongs and suggest that her poor cousin was losing her balance. She ought to see an alienist! The impossibility of making Sybil see anyone against her will had not occurred to the lady; she thought this should be Janet's task. Impossible, the latter told her, with no medical authority. Some time ago she had

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advised Mrs. Mappin to consult Dr. McGregor at Muss, an experienced and well-liked general practitioner, but Sybil would not hear of it. The quieter she was kept the better. Janet urged her visitor to give way, and hold the Service herself in the Castle. Somewhat appeased by this, the Deaconess had departed to prepare her sermon, mercifully unaware of Janet's language when the door closed. One of Selina's inducements offered to Sybil had been that "even Marigold" wished to breakfast with the communicants at Muss in order to stay for the second service. And presumably, Church Parade!

Janet was convinced that the mysterious "Peter" belonged to the Air Force, but since he had left the neighbourhood it would be difficult to find him, unless Marigold changed her mind, which was unlikely, passionately in love, as her mother had been with Aylmer Leigh. Janet's thoughts came to a full stop. Was this the inspiration she sought? Surely, when the worst was over that old affair should make Sybil more reasonable. She had known temptation herself, and yielded to it, in full. Returning to her sitting-room Janet drew a blank sheet of paper forward, the writer's aid to concentration. Presently, she began to jot down the opening moves, then a précis of a similar situation, which could serve in a work of fiction. At last she read it through, and absently crossed out an adjective that seemed superfluous. Yes, it would do.

She looked at the clock, and a new idea seized her. Why not go now? Sybil would have seen Mrs. Brown to arrange the food, and Marigold would be safe in the school-room. No one would notice her arrival, or guess there was any disturbance. Her excuse was ready, her brain clear. Up she went for her mackintosh and rubber boots, then out into the fog.

In the hollow the boggy ground squelched under her feet, and she was glad to reach the upward slope, where she hugged the wall. There was not a soul about as she slipped through Marigold's room and tapped at Sybil's door. She heard an impatient voice:

"Who's that?"

"Janet. Am I disturbing you?"

"No, come in, my dear." Sybil rose from her desk. "I was only doing accounts. Such a dreadful day! Take off those wet things and sit here." The Chesterfield drawn

up to the burning logs. "Nice to see you! Not writing?"

"Can't!" Janet settled herself in the opposite corner. "I'm stuck in a new book, one I'm planning, and wondered if you would help me."

"I should love to. What is the trouble?"

"A mother's reaction." Janet forced a smile. "Outside my personal experience!"

"Lucky, perhaps, in these days? Although I must say Marigold has been a good child of late, more considerate, and working well, Miss Plowden tells me. Perhaps, the war has sobered her. But do start your story."

"All right. I'll try and make it as brief as I can." Janet reassembled her ideas. "It concerns a woman of forty, whose husband is in a private asylum, a hopeless case. Her son died at school from an accident and she was left with an only daughter, whom she watched, fearing she might have inherited the taint."

"She didn't know of it when she married?"

"No, although it was in the family. This only came out later, before the husband was taken away. The daughter resembles him, with the same dreamy, romantic nature, inclined to be hysterical. Otherwise attractive, a very pretty, ethereal creature, eighteen when the real story begins. Ann—my name for the mother—was determined to keep Iris from marriage and children, the idea eugenically sound but rather hard on the girl. She took an isolated country house, gave Iris an excellent governess and simple amusements, riding, with a groom behind her, keeping pets, and playing tennis with the Vicar's daughters. There were few young men in the neighbourhood and having no son Ann could ignore them. She hoped that Iris would settle down comfortably to be an old maid."

A faint irony sounded in Janet's voice, and Sybil asked sharply:

"Why not?"

"Because such resignation generally comes from being unwanted. With money and looks Iris would probably find a husband. Still, the mother thought it her duty to keep men at a distance."

"Poor soul, yes! A lonely existence for her?"

"But she hadn't always been lonely, had known a full share of love in the past."

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"From an insane husband?"

"No, although at first they were happy. Later on, after the tragedy, she met a man who attracted her." Must be careful now, Janet was thinking. "A fine soldier, attached to the local barracks—it was a garrison town. He was devoted to Ann, and separated from his wife. In due course they became lovers, a discreetly veiled affair, her children too young to guess. But after three years the regiment was ordered abroad. For him there was no hope of divorce, his wife a strict Roman Catholic, or Ann might have done the same and married him. They parted, and not too soon, for the daughter was nearly thirteen. It was then Ann took this house in the country, and at first her plan succeeded."

Janet paused, and Sybil said, with a touch of mischief:

"Don't tell me she ran away with the groom! But that belonged to our grandmothers' time. I'm sorry, my dear, but you looked so serious!"

"It's rather important." Janet frowned, her train of thought broken. "A tragedy, in fact. The girl becomes discontented, feels something is missing in her life. Then one day an artist staying in the village calls to ask if he may paint the old house. Ann is out, but Iris finds him at the door and offers to show him the grounds. When her mother returns she is annoyed, still more so when he calls again. She refuses his request. But the mischief is done, and now his desire is to paint Iris, an artist's type. They meet in a wood on the estate, easy to enter from the road, at first in the day-time, then, fearful of Ann's supervision, by night. When everyone is asleep the girl slips out to join her lover."

"Disgusting!" Sybil exclaimed. "Deceiving Ann, such a good mother! I hope she doesn't marry him?"

"No, though that would have been the best solution. He goes away, leaving her to expect a child. Now, this is my difficulty." Janet hurried on, conscious of Sybil's repugnance, "When the secret comes out will the mother remember her own passionate affair, and after the first shock make allowances for the girl?"

"Certainly not! A totally different case. A young girl, brought up so carefully—it's appalling! Surely you don't take her part?"

"I remember that she has inherited her mother's

passionate temperament, and that her very seclusion, with no knowledge of the world, would lay her open to seduction. I was hoping you'd agree that a just woman would realise this and show mercy?"

"Well, she wouldn't!" Sybil's brow was dark. "She would wish the girl had never been born!" Her voice rose. "Probably, curse her and hope that the baby——"

"Stop!" Janet cried, moved by a sudden superstition. "Put yourself in her place. Would *you* have forgotten Aylmer Leigh?"

Startled, Sybil stared at her.

"Are you trying to tell me something?" Suspicion quickened. "Not—oh, my God! Not Marigold?"

It had come out too soon, and at the sight of Sybil's congested face Janet trembled.

"Listen, my dear," she implored.

But it was too late. Mrs. Mappin threw off the detaining hand and rose to her feet. Her lips parted, but no words came, only raucous sounds. All Janet could do was to break her fall. . . .

The bitterness of failure mingled with her grief as after a brief examination she stood, looking down at the unconscious woman, breathing stertorously. Life was there, but the spirit was absent. In what shape would it return? Suddenly, Janet thought of Marigold and this terrible punishment, then of the child in her womb. It wasn't fair, for this could have happened at any time in one of Sybil's rages. Her brain worked swiftly, and presently, her hand went out to press the bell.

When she heard steps she moved quickly to meet Mrs. Brown outside the door. The old housekeeper took the sad news better than Janet had expected.

"The poor mistress! But I've seen it coming. Those tempers of hers and she wouldn't rest. She'll have to now if, please God, she's spared. A paralytic stroke?" Nothing would have induced her to call it apoplexy, the fate of old gentlemen addicted to port. Paralysis was respectable. She lifted her wet eyes to Janet's grave face. "Can I see her, doctor?"

"Yes, come in. You must be prepared for a change, but she doesn't suffer."

Her quiet voice steadied the other for the ordeal.

"Deary me!" Mrs. Brown wiped away a tear. "Her

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poor face all twisted! She won't like that. If—will she come round, doctor?"

"I hope so. It's difficult to say." Janet was feeling Sybil's pulse again. "I want to send for Dr. McGregor, but this fog isn't safe for Charlie. She'd never get into the harbour. We shall have to wait till it clears. Do you know where Clara is?"

"In the kitchen with me," Mrs. Brown mumbled. "We must get the poor mistress to bed."

"Yes, and Clara's the best to help. She'll be heavy to lift." Janet straightened her back, for the old woman's grief was infectious. "Will you fetch her, and warn her to say nothing at present? I don't want Marigold told."

"No, the poor child! Such a shock for her, although——" Mrs. Brown left the sentence incomplete, and with a final, "Deary me!" departed.

Clara arrived, brisk and professional. She liked and respected Janet, but had never cared much for Mrs. Mappin, and now she saw a chance of getting out of household chores. She didn't mind night work, she told Janet, visualising a good novel and a kettle handy to make herself tea at all hours.

"I've nursed a case like this before," she announced, bustling about, and gave an order to Mrs. Brown, "We shall want clean sheets."

The housekeeper went out, wondering what the world was coming to.

Still, it was better, Janet decided, than having a stranger in the place, and if Sybil lingered on Clara would be useful. When all was ready, the inert body between the sheets, she glanced at the clock, surprised to see how late it was. Leaving Clara in charge, she went to the schoolroom.

Marigold was putting away her books, and looked up as Janet addressed Miss Plowden.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but Mrs. Mappin is ill." Aware of the girl's tense attitude she turned to her. "I'm afraid I shan't be able to have that little talk with her to-day. You remember? Still, it can wait." She saw Marigold let out a pent breath. "I'm sending for Dr. McGregor as soon as the fog lifts."

"Shall I go to her?"

"No, my dear. She is better alone, with Clara, so keep away from the room. It was fortunate I was there. I



came across for a reference book and put my head in to say good morning. Your mother was trying to reach the bell, and I got to her before she collapsed."

This was the story she had prepared, already accepted by Mrs. Brown and Clara.

"Is she very ill?" Marigold's voice was awed. "Not dangerously?"

"I hope not. We shall know better when she comes round, but that mayn't be for some time."

"You'd let me know at once if she asked for me?" the girl urged.

"I promise you that, my dear."

A safe answer, Miss Plowden thought, guessing the truth.

"I'm so sorry," she murmured. "Is there anything I can do to help you, Dr. Janet?"

"Only keep this child quiet. It may be a long illness, and it's no good getting upset. I'm wondering who should go with Charlie to Muss. I can't leave the house." Janet's eyes searched Miss Plowden's. "The Deaconess, I suppose?"

"A relation? Yes. She could tell Dr. McGregor about Mrs. Mappin's general health, and I think she'd expect to. Does she know yet?"

"No, I wanted to tell Marigold first."

"I don't like Cousin Selina explaining things," the girl objected. "What will she say about you, Aunt Janet?"

"I think I can trust her to be tactful in a crisis like this. It isn't really important." Janet smiled. "Your mother comes first. Now try not to fret. I shall tell the others at dinner."

"And you ought to wash your hands," said Miss Plowden practically. "Don't make a noise in the bathroom."

What a sensible woman she was, Janet thought, crossing to the library, where she had seen the Deaconess, writing.

To Janet's relief, she showed the best side of her nature, grieved but resigned. Like Mrs. Brown, she had "seen it coming." Had there been anything to upset her cousin?

"I can't say." True, in one sense. "There was no one there when I arrived. I suppose you didn't hear any disturbance?"

"It's been perfectly quiet, everyone busy." The Deaconess looked up at Janet's pale face. "It must have been a great shock for you. Such an old friend! To me

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the sad thing is that she wasn't prepared. Still, God works in hidden ways, and if she recovers——" She paused. "Do you think she will?"

"No one can prophesy. She is paralysed on the right side. But Dr. McGregor will tell you more."

"That is another point." The Deaconess blinked. "What do you wish me to say to him about yourself? Personally, I should be quite satisfied with your treatment. I hope you understand that?"

"Thank you, I do." Surprised, Janet had seen that she was sincere. "But, of course, it's impossible. I suggest you should tell Dr. McGregor that I've had a medical training, but am not qualified to practise, and gave up the idea when I came to the island."

"Yes, that is excellent. But I shall also say that we call you 'Dr. Janet,' as if anyone cuts their fingers they run to you, and we couldn't get on without you." Selina smiled gravely. "I mean that. So now let us go and see my poor cousin." At this moment the gong sounded "Perhaps it would be better after dinner. You say Clara is with her? What a mercy we have a trained nurse here in war-time!"

Joining Miss Plowden and Marigold in the hall they passed into the refectory. There, in Sybil's chair at the head of the table, Janet broke the news. Despite the dull pain in her heart the result stirred her dormant humour. She could read in the faces turned to her the thought: "What is to become of us?" Amy, who was waiting with Irene, pointed out a wing of chicken: Dr. Janet must keep up her strength. Ruth for once was silent, looking apprehensively at her sister. Nearer to Janet, Anna was fighting against the hope that now she might get a free chance of painting, and Marigold was lost in a dream. Would Aunt Janet allow her to go to Muss, if the illness continued? Was that selfish? She must pray hard that her mother would recover, but a little break in the prison bars might mean everything to Piers. Where was he? What would he say when he returned and found her expecting a baby? He'd simply love it, of course; his uncle too, someone to carry on the name. An "heir"? That was what Piers had called himself.

Madame Ducroy came in flushed from cooking, and made a neat and appropriate speech. She was not in the least

anxious for Sybil to recover, having learnt from Mrs. Brown that Janet would take her place until Marigold came of age. Life would be certainly gayer. She sighed, remembering Pierre, and fell back on the French belief that the Maginot line was impregnable.

Here Polly created a diversion:

"Fog's clearing." No one else could see a change, as it pressed against the windows. "It will be gone by tea-time."

"Then you must be ready, Charlie," Janet told the electrician. "The Deaconess has kindly offered to go to Muss and see Dr. McGregor. He should be in then for his surgery work."

"Okay." Charlie suddenly grinned. "The sea's smooth enough."

"I should go in any case," the Deaconess said repressively. "You don't seem to understand, Charlotte, how serious it is."

"Oh yes, I do." Charlie scowled. "But it's no good making things worse. Mrs. Mappin would like us to carry on just the same."

The general depression deepened. Janet was thankful when Grace was pronounced. As the company dispersed she said to Marigold:

"I want to talk to you, as soon as I can. In your room, ten minutes from now, when the Deaconess has seen your mother."

"Mayn't I come too?"

"No, darling. She wouldn't recognise you, and the Deaconess will want to be alone."

This painful mission accomplished, Selina shocked, and Clara to the fore, Janet rejoined the girl.

"Well, that's over," she said involuntarily, and saw Marigold smile. "A good woman, but trying. Now about yourself. I want you to be very careful that no one guesses your condition at present. Otherwise, someone will suggest that it was the cause of your mother's stroke. Ruth, for instance; she's spiteful enough! We've plenty on our hands without that. So try to hold yourself up straight and——"

Marigold filled the pause:

"Keep my tummy in? I will. I got out of swimming the end of last month, afraid of it's showing, but now it's too cold."

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"Yes, a good excuse. I wonder if you could get into an old belt of mine?"

"It won't pinch my baby?" Marigold asked anxiously.

"No, but you may feel a little stiff at first, as you've never worn one. Still, we'll try. You understand the reason?"

"I do. It would be awful just now, and I'm so thankful mother didn't know." Marigold looked wistfully into Janet's face. "You are sweet! Still my friend?"

"Yes, my child, though I don't approve of your conduct. I brought you into the world, and I think I know you pretty well. But I can't do that for your baby. I shall have to hand you over to Dr. McGregor." Janet saw the girl's dismay. "If he comes to-morrow he'd better see you too."

"Oh, Aunt Janet, *must* he?"

"If you want your baby to have every chance. You can't be a mother without suffering."

"I don't mind that, but a strange man?"

"Old and experienced. A woman's body means no more to a doctor than an anatomical design, so remember that. I shall have to tell him the whole story, and ask him to treat it in confidence. The only alternative"—Janet paused, watching the girl—"is for you to get in touch with this Peter and if the war allows it he might marry you first. Charlie could post the letter."

To her surprise she saw mischief bubble up in the girl's face.

"No. You don't catch me like that! I'll see Dr. McGregor to-morrow."

"I think you're very foolish. The name will have to come out, sooner or later. But I mustn't stay. I want to get back to your mother."

Marigold watched her pass through the bathroom, and bit her lip. She mustn't weaken because she was fond of Aunt Janet. Fancy the birdman losing his wings! Like Lucifer falling from the skies.

Polly's prophecy was fulfilled, and the launch started out for Muss, relying on the long twilight of the North to return. It brought the welcome news that Dr. McGregor would expect it at two o'clock on the morrow, the earliest time he could start, and he must be back by five. The Castle settled down to conjecture and troubled sleep, "Nurse Parr", her new name, insisting on night duty,

Janet in a room next to Mrs. Brown, where the bell would waken her if necessary.

She knew Dr. McGregor by sight, having met him at the chemist's in Muss, standing aside herself, so that he could give his order, for about him was the air of a busy man. He had stared at her with deep blue eyes set in kindly wrinkles, and said abruptly, "Thank you. Good morning!" before he passed out. The chemist had sung his praises, and Janet had looked up his qualifications in case he should ever be needed. An Edinburgh man, who had been at Muss for the past thirty years, with a wide practice. You couldn't beat a Scot with good brains, she held, remembering the one under whom she had trained in her hospital days. He seemed to have a gift of clairvoyance when it came to a diagnosis, and this man reminded her of him.

The Deaconess had not been pleased with Dr. McGregor, impatient under her lengthy explanations. He had cut her short with, "I'll see when I come."

Janet remembered this, and smiled sympathetically, as she waited next afternoon in the library, reserved for their interview. Presently, Marigold slipped in.

"He's here!"

"Then you know what to do?"

"Yes. I told Miss Plowden I was going to the farm—I will later—so no one will come to my room."

She turned to depart and nearly collided with Dr. McGregor in the doorway, a short man with a grizzled head, broad shoulders and a lingering twinkle in his eye as he shook hands with Janet.

"We've met before," he told her. "In the chemist's at Muss, and I haven't forgotten you. Though I didn't expect to be called to this island." A faint burr marked his speech. "A preevilege, I understand?"

Janet guessed his intention and said rather coldly:

"Won't you sit down? Before you see the patient there is something I want to explain."

"By all means." He settled himself in the chair. "I'd like your opeenion of Mrs. Mappin."

Surprised, Janet responded:

"It's your professional one we need." She lowered her voice. "But between ourselves, I've two patients for you, though nobody guesses this yet. The second is Mrs.

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Mappin's daughter, a girl of seventeen, unmarried, and pregnant."

"Not that bonnie lass I met just now?" He saw her nod. "That's a bad business. How did it happen, in a feminine community? I was told that no man was allowed on the island."

Janet explained briefly, then decided to add the scene with the mother. She ended:

"I did my best to soften the blow, but failed."

"No one could blame you for that. I gathered from the lady who called on me that Mrs. Mappin was subject to fits of uncontrollable temper." He thought for a moment. "It's a dreadful poseetion for the girl."

"She doesn't know. I said I found her mother ill and reached her before she fell. That's what everyone believes." Janet was suddenly nervous under his steady gaze. "It didn't seem fair—or wise."

"Then all I can say is there isn't much charity in this world and it's good to meet it. I congratulate you, Miss Vickers." He saw her relief, and smiled gravely. "A curious story? One of those young airmen, I guess. And rare devils they are! But brave as they're made. Look at the way they bombed Kiel. We'll take care of the lassie between us." Dr. McGregor rose. "I'd better see Mrs. Mappin first. You don't leave her alone?"

"Never. We are fortunate in having a trained nurse in the community, whom I can trust." They passed into the hall. There was Miss Plowden in the schoolroom with the door open, determined that Ruth should not listen at the opposite keyhole. "That was Marigold's governess," Janet told the doctor. "A very nice woman."

"She still has lessons, then? A good thing. Keep her mind employed."

"Yes. Mind the step down," Janet warned him. "This is Mrs. Mappin's private suite."

Nurse Parr had electrified the household by appearing in a starched apron, collar and cuffs, with a winged cap that was very becoming, part of her old uniform, kept for sentimental reasons, and laundered by Rachel, under protest. She rustled forward to be introduced, the room spick and span, as Dr. McGregor noted, admiring its fine proportions. He confirmed Janet's diagnosis. There was nothing to be done, except wait, and watch the patient.

"You'd like to wash your hands?" Janet suggested, finally. "And then Miss Mappin wants to meet you. She is anxious about her mother."

Cleverly explained, he thought, when they entered Marigold's room next door and found the girl in bed. She looked a mere child, the golden plaits on either side of her fresh young face, and Dr. McGregor felt a sharp anger against the man who had brought her to this pass. He was puzzled by her candid expression, which held no consciousness of shame, and the eager way she talked of "my baby."

"No trouble there," he told Janet when they were safe in the library. "She was born to be a mother! But why doesn't she write and tell the man? The sooner they're married the better."

"I think she's afraid it might get him into disgrace, and I can't break down her silence. She says it will be all right when her 'Peter' returns. But supposing he doesn't? He's evidently serving, and he might be killed at any moment. I went so far as to suggest this and she shook her head. Not if she prayed for him hard! Incidentally, his parting present to her was a New Testament, the first she has ever had." Janet saw the other's surprise. "Her mother is a confirmed agnostic, only lately has allowed Miss Plowden to give her religious instruction. But you must want your tea."

It had been laid on the table. Anna tapped, and came in with the teapot and hot scones, to depart at once.

"That's a clever face," Dr. McGregor said when the door had closed.

"Miss Severn is a barrister. She came here when her private income failed and she couldn't wait any longer for briefs, nearly starved in the attempt. Now she has taken up painting and is making a little money by it, so she may go back to the Bar one day. Milk and sugar?"

"Please. You've some interesting people here."

"It was Mrs. Mappin's idea to provide for such cases." Janet passed the doctor his cup. "Especially, when failure was due to what she calls 'man's injustice.' Nurse Parr, for instance, was the victim of bigamy."

"That so?" Dr. McGregor looked at her thoughtfully. "Not a very healthy atmosphere for a girl of seventeen. Is there no one of Miss Mappin's own age?"

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"Unfortunately, no. Try a hot scone?" Janet lifted the lid. "Our own butter, made at the farm. The youngest woman here is the farmer's daughter, twenty-six, with the mind of a child of ten. A case of arrested development. Marigold's best friend is the electrician who brought you. Known as 'Charlie.'"

"The woman with the nævus? I took her at first for a lad! Has she been badly treated too?" At Janet's reply, he frowned. "Hm! I begin to understand, if he was young and good-looking, how that girl flew into her lover's arms. The whole thing's unnatural. You must forgive my speaking plainly."

Janet smiled into the wise old eyes.

"I do, and between ourselves I agree. Fond as I am of my poor friend, she has been far too strict with her daughter, because of her fear of men. Marigold has not been allowed to leave the island since we came, eleven years ago. Except once, when I broke the rule during Mrs. Mappin's absence and took her for a picnic on the launch. You should have seen her excitement! A glimpse of the forbidden world. I am telling you this, Dr. McGregor, because I am afraid of what may happen if Mrs. Mappin recovers. The child will have a bad enough time without that among the women here, most of them suffering from frustration. I'm almost glad Marigold has escaped it." The colour had risen in her cheeks. "I suppose that sounds immoral?"

"No, good psychology. But I should have known it from your books, that clever one about hospital life." He answered her glance of surprise. "I've read most of them, and I'm glad to meet you, Dr. Janet, if you forgive the liberty. It's what your electrician called you, and I think it's a pity you didn't go on with medicine." He drew out his watch. "Afraid I must go! Thank you for my excellent tea. I don't think it's much good my coming again at present, unless there's a change in Mrs. Mappin's condection. Will you let me know when you want me?"

Janet agreed, and saw him off from the jetty. She stood there for a few minutes enjoying the breeze, going through the interview again. From the first she had been aware of the busy man's friendliness, unexpected, but probably due to the fact that he had known her through her books and had looked forward to meeting the author. Since she



wrote under a pseudonym Janet supposed that the Deaconess had enlightened him on the subject, or possibly, Charlie. And how good it had been to meet a clever man again and return for a brief hour to her lost profession. She liked Dr. McGregor, and hoped he might prove a rock of defence for the girl she loved in the trials ahead.

## CHAPTER XII

MARIGOLD stood on the cliff path in the grey afternoon light, watching a coastal steamer follow the line of the headland. She was a prey to anxiety, for Piers had not come, although his leave was over-due, and there had been no message in the copies of *The Times* to-day. Janet had urged her to write to him, but Marigold dare not do this, and Muss was forbidden ground. Mrs. Mappin still lay, devoid of speech, in a semi-coma. Nevertheless, there had been moments when she showed a glimmer of intelligence and would gaze at Clara in her nurse's cap with a puzzled expression, so Janet could allow no relaxation of the rules.

Absorbed in troubled thought, the girl did not see Madame Ducroy approaching from the direction of the farm. The north-westerly wind blew, and a sudden gust sent Marigold's cape flying. At a little distance Solange caught her breath and halted, her eyes on the figure braced against the onslaught. *Pas possible!* How could anyone be *enceinte* on this manless island? She had realised that the girl was unhappy, and ascribed this to her mother's surmise were correct everything was explained, even Marigold's lack of interest in her dress, wearing that shapeless jumper and skirt day after day. The Frenchwoman's practical mind dismissed conjecture regarding the mysterious lover and swept to her friend's immediate need, a confidante, in whom she could trust. How was she to approach the matter? Surely, by confiding her own secret. In Mrs. Mappin's present state—and Solange did not believe she would recover—the risk was slight. Her heart filled with pity, thinking of what Marigold would have to

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face from the rest of the community. She moved on again, humming a song, saw the girl start and turn her head.

"Hullo!" she greeted Solange. "A bit blowy for you, isn't it?"

"Yes, detestable, *chérie*! Ze good God made ze sun, and ze devil ze wind! Still, I exercise myself and feel virtuous!" Looking into the tawny eyes Solange saw they were larger, more lustrous than of yore, a sign that added to her suspicion. Another gust caught them, and she cried, "Let us find a shelter?"

"We could go to the cottage." Marigold slipped a supporting hand through her arm. "Come along! I was on my way to dust it for Aunt Janet. She is always too busy, now she sleeps at the Castle."

"Zen I will 'elp." They fell into step. "Ze docteur must miss 'er leetle 'ome and 'er quietude?"

"Her writing too, but she won't leave mother for long. They were friends before I was born. Seventeen years ago!"

"Zat make you feel old?" Solange was smiling. "What I would give to be your age! Not to live ze same life again, wiz all its meestakes—but zis wind blow my breff away!"

In silence they reached the cottage and Marigold opened the door.

"Not even locked!" Solange exclaimed. "Still, no man can land on ze island."

The girl, face averted, laid her cape on a chair, but Solange had seen her colour rise. Now she shivered, pulling down the shapeless jumper.

"This place feels damp! I must light the fire. Sit down whilst I fetch the sticks."

"No, give me a brush and pan, *chérie*. Ze carpet is full of dust!" Removing her coat, Solange dismissed Marigold's protest. "Eet will make me warm. But per'aps, an apron? And I tie zis scarf round my 'air."

Marigold found one of Janet's overalls, hanging behind the scullery door, and the pair set to work.

"The chimney's damp too," the girl grumbled, on her knees trying to coax the wood into a feeble flame. "I know!" Rising, she opened a cupboard and dived into a blue paper bag. "Sugar! That will do the trick."

"Oh, naughty! In war-time," Solange reproved her,

busily sweeping. "But we will keep our leetle secret. Zat is ze true test of friendship."

She could almost see suggestion at work in the quick glance Marigold gave her, for the girl was tempted. On the radio last night she had heard the ominous words: "Three planes missing." Was this why there had been no message? She pulled herself together. Piers had promised that if anything went wrong his uncle would inform her at once, whatever the result might be; Mrs. Mappin's wrath did not weigh in the scales against the agony of unbroken silence. Piers was safe in the gentle hands of Jesus, bearing him up in answer to her prayers. A puff of smoke blew into her face, an excuse for rubbing her eyes. Then a flame leaped up and the wood crackled.

"It will go now." She scrambled to her feet. "So give me those. I didn't bring you here to work."

"No, I feenish. Zis carpet should shake. I do not like ze way you nail zem down, not clean." Opening the window Solange threw out the dust and fluff, regardless of the terrace below, in true Continental fashion. "Now we will 'ave a leetle rest for it to settle. I will take zis arm-chair, wiz ze cushion for you before ze fire. Is zat selfish?"

"No, very nice." Marigold settled down, her back against her friend's knees, with a sense of comfort. "It's so lovely to get away from the others!"

"And not be asked: 'Where you going!' As if we were back in ze convent!" Solange drew out her vanity case and powdered her flushed face. "Or 'ave your lady *curé* frown if I repair myself, and tell Amy I am a lost woman!" Carefully, she reddened her lips. "Per'aps I am, but ze one t'ing she never see is zat I 'ave trouble. *Que la vie est triste!*"

Marigold twisted round to look into the dark eyes.

"Is anything wrong? Your brother, again?"

"Yes, and no! I 'ave a mind to tell you, *chérie*. If you will keep my secret?"

"Of course I will. I promise."

"Zen I trust you. Pierre is not my bruzzer; 'e is *mon cher ami*." She saw surprise, then a swift sympathy fill the girl's raised face, as she gathered the meaning of this. "You must pardon me for deceiving you, but I was afraid—afraild of your *maman*. She would turn me out if she

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knew we were lovers! But what to do? We cannot marry, for 'is parents refuse zeir consent. After I divorce my most unworthy 'usband. Zey send Pierre to ze London office to get 'im away from me, but 'e write and I follow. We are so 'appy!" Solange's clasped hands went to her breast. "'E love me so mooch! I plan to start a leetle 'at shop, wiz 'im to keep ze books; zen come ze shadow of ze war. All is lost! 'E must fight and leave me, so I come 'ere far from ze Boche to please 'im. And now I feel I sacrifice in vain my parents, my Church and ze man I adore. I am a woman desolate!"

"Oh, *poor* Solange!" Marigold's arms went round the slender waist. "It's cruel! And I do understand, because I've a secret too! If I tell you, you won't breathe a word?"

Solange took the Saints to witness her discretion, and Marigold poured out her story. The Frenchwoman, listening, marvelled, and compared it to *Paul et Virginie*. How young they were—how imprudent! But who could blame the girl, she thought, on this lonely island, knowing love for the first time, and utterly unprepared? It was the mother's fault, that hard, possessive woman, with her unnatural hatred of men. Marigold had reached the climax of her misery:

"I daren't write to him, with Aunt Janet watching the letters. And he can't reply," she wailed. "Sometimes, I think I'll go mad, waiting!"

She buried her face in her friend's lap, her shoulders quivering.

"Zere is no need." Solange stroked the golden head. "Do not cry, *chérie*, for it is simple. I address ze envelopes for you—zat remind me! I do once before. It was to your lover?"

"Yes!" A sob. "But I want to hear from him!"

"So you shall. I ask a friend in London to send some envelopes directed to me, and you put one inside for 'is reply. No one will recognise 'er 'and." Here Marigold's head came up with a jerk, wonder and hope in her tear-clouded eyes. "I do not open zem, 'ave no fear, because of a leetle mark zat we recognise. I pass zem to you when we are alone and it is safe—oh!" Breathless and tumbled, she disengaged herself. "Is zat 'ow your man kees you?"

"I'm sorry!" Marigold apologised. "But I couldn't help it! You're such a lamb! I wish I'd told you before." A sudden thought struck her. "How selfish I am! Isn't there anything I can do for you?"

"Remain my friend, and zat is enough. My friend of ze heart, as we say. But we must be prudent. Not too many letters, or people will remark, 'Ow beeg'er post 'as become!' I 'ave not two bruzzers, *voyons!*" Solange thought for a moment. "Zat one I direct was to your old nurse?"

"No, an old nurse of Piers." The name slipped out and she added quickly, "I call him 'Peter' to Aunt Janet."

"Zat is curious, two Pierres, *hein?* You do not take mine, by chance? But let us be serious, now zat we 'ave zis quiet moment. We continue to send ze letters zere, more convenient?"

"Rather! It would look suspicious for you to have a friend in the R.A.F. You see, how I trust you? Aunt Janet doesn't know this, but you can guess how anxious I am."

The girl's face had clouded over again.

"Zey bear a charmed life," Solange told her soothingly. "So brave! See, why not write to him now? I will sweep ze rooms above and leave you tranquil. So up you get! And for zis time onlee I will address ze envelope to slip inside." Moving to the table, she picked up a pen and examined the nib. "*Dieu*, it is like a spade! Still, I persist . . . and I put zis line below, to show it is from your Pierre. Now anozzer, to ze old nurse."

This finished, at Marigold's dictation, Solange picked up the dustpan and brush, and departed. The girl, in Janet's chair at the littered table, poured out her heart to Piers, deaf to sounds above, with a pause whilst Madame Ducroy examined a signed photograph of Michael Chaytor. Was this another forbidden romance? There were his books on the shelf above, and Anna had mentioned the playwright, alluding to him as Janet's friend. Solange had been surprised by the feminine atmosphere of the larger room, next to the one with its bare white walls and narrow bed, designed for an isolation ward, in case of any infectious complaint. She lifted the cut-glass stopper and inhaled the Chanel scent on the dressing-table, a large and costly bottle suggesting a man's gift, then smiled. Mrs. Mappin did not know everything! And never would, Solange hoped.

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Why couldn't she die? Before the inevitable disclosure. For she was certain now, although Marigold had withheld her condition. It was bad enough to think of all those women; hawks, pecking a dove! For deeply they would resent the child. The smaller room, suggesting a prison cell, intrigued her. She had heard of Polly's punishment, and she shuddered. Anything could happen on this island! She must do her best to protect Marigold. Oh, these English, with their cold hearts and abominable climate!

When at last she went down the narrow stairs she found the girl busy in the scullery, an aura of happiness about her.

"I've scrubbed the sink," she greeted Solange. "And put the kettle on, as the water isn't hot, so now you can have a wash. I'll fetch it!"

"And where is ze letter? I will put it in my bag to slip in ze box to-morrow." She took it from Marigold, amused to see her drag it up from inside her jumper. "You did not use a clean piece of blotting paper?"

"I don't remember. Why?"

"It could be read in a mirror, so we will burn it." She saw Marigold's eyes widen, and smiled. "I am a married woman, *voyons*, and accustomed to zese leetle precautions."

Marigold's laugh rang out.

"I'll remember that when—— Good idea!"

She went off for the kettle wondering what Solange would say if she knew of that ceremony on the Ram. Her youth had revived, and with it youth's mischief. It was rather amusing to be taken for a desperate sinner! What a lark it would be one day to introduce Piers as "my husband"! That would make Cousin Selina sit up, for the girl expected no mercy there. Solange had taken it for granted that she and Piers were lovers in every sense of the word and it was not likely that she would change when she heard of the baby. Marigold dreaded the disclosure. Still, with Janet and Solange for friends it would not be so bad, and of course Charlie would stick to her. The thought that troubled her most was the effect on Miss Plowden. She would be dreadfully shocked and upset, and the girl hated hurting her. Yet to tell the truth was impossible, for she would go straight to Janet. No, stand firm for her dear one's sake. He had enough to cope with. Three planes missing. . . .

The wind had dropped, and when they left the cottage the pair took the path along the cliff, to enjoy the fresh air after their labours. Suddenly, Marigold pointed ahead.

"Whatever are those? Fowls! And there's Polly running after them. Silly ass, she's driving them into the heather!"

"She 'as no mind," Solange said composedly.

Quickening their pace they came within ear-shot, and Polly cried:

"Don't turn them back! 'Tis the Inspector!" Panting, shooing the excited birds before her, she joined them. "I've let half out, Ma's got the young ducks in the cellar, and Charlie's hiding some of the pigs! He'll have a job counting them!"

"But where is the Inspector?" Marigold asked.

"Dr. Janet's giving him whisky. Go on, you old silly!"

A cockerel had sprung on to a rock and was crowing triumphantly. Polly was off, waving her arms. Marigold looked at Solange and laughed.

"I wonder if Aunt Janet is in it, or if it's one of Charlie's mad games?" She frowned. "Rather like cheating, though?"

"No, it is very sensible, as you will know when food gets scarce. If you 'ave enough to feed zem? Fowls do not live on love!" The piquant face lit up. "*Tiens! Ze inspecteur can post your letter. I will be on ze watch for 'im. Zat is a good idea?*"

"Simply gorgeous!" Marigold cried. "He'll have it a week earlier!"

"And you 'is response. But do not look so excited, *chérie*. You must learn to control your preety face. Above all when ze post arrive, or people will guess. I never read mine in public, wiz zat leetle *bossue* creeping about, but take it upstairs. I will make an excuse, a reel of cotton or somet'ing, and you can bring it to my room." They had reached the swimming pool and Solange halted. "Per'aps, we do not go in togezzer? And I 'ave not been in ze cottage, remember. One cannot be too careful. But tell me first, 'ow is your *maman*?"

"Just the same. I peeped at her through the crack in the door. She looks dreadful, poor dear!" Marigold repressed a shudder. "Can't speak, though I don't think she wants to, just stares vacantly into space."

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"Zen it is wise you keep away. Wiz ze sick new faces trouble." Solange was thinking of the girl's condition. "It would be merciful if ze good God took her. But you must not dwell on sad t'ings; you 'ave to be beautiful when your Pierre return, and not grow ze wrinkles. Zat ees wrong! Wrinkles."

Laughing, waving her hand, she was off. Marigold could not see the change in her expression when the door in the wall lay behind her, all frivolity banished.

Reaching the tower room the girl was glad to sit down and draw off a canvas shoe in search of a pebble. She shook it out, and lay back, the basket-work creaking. Soon she was lost in a dream of her first letter from Piers. Would it be a love-letter, like her own? She started as the gong for tea rang out, and went to the glass to smooth her hair. A ribbon was missing, probably dropped at the cottage. Since her mother could no longer pry among her belongings, she had added her lover's gifts to those in the drawer. She mustn't be late. Absently, she picked up a ribbon, divided in two, and fastened the plaits.

Must tidy the drawer, she decided, slipping on a pair of old house shoes. Finally, she pulled down the skirt in front, which she had let out. It was beginning to be an effort to keep herself straight. "Tummy in!" she reminded herself, and giggled to restore her courage. If Solange hadn't guessed no one would yet.

In the kitchen Miss Plowden greeted her, thinking how fresh and happy she looked:

"Did you go to the Pirate's Rock?"

"No, I've been giving the cottage a clean. You never saw such dust! Then I met Polly." She told Miss Plowden about the fowls. "What I'd like to know is where they put the young pigs!"

"You ax no questions." Charlie had joined the pair and was thrusting a plate of buns at Marigold. "The Inspector's there now, if he hasn't come back. He seemed in a bit of a hurry, has another farm to overhaul on the mainland." Charlie's eyes narrowed. "You didn't see him?"

"Only Polly, off her head with excitement! Oh, here's Anna! Let's tell her."

"I know. I took in the decanter, whilst Charlie spread the news. Dr. Janet said he must need a drink after the



choppy sea. So tactful? But what I'm afraid of is we'll have other inspectors. Our whisky's too good!" Anna laughed. "He rolled a bit crossing the lawn. So long as he doesn't see double?"

"I never thought of that," said Charlie blankly.

"New ribbons?" a voice behind them broke in.

Marigold swung round, and drew her plait away from Ruth.

"They aren't." And suddenly, she saw her mistake, one of those Piers had bought her. "At least—I lost one dusting the cottage."

"I've never seen that peacock-blue before," the hunchback persisted, her beady eyes curious. "Where did it come from?"

"A little bird brought it!"

"Who?"

"Cock Robin!"

"A new name for me." Solange had quietly entered the room. "But I am not one of zose leetle birds zat tell tales!"

"One for you, Ruth!" Charlie guffawed. "I saw you sneaking after the Inspector. Afraid Polly would cut you out?"

"Now, now," the Deaconess neighed. "You mustn't tease Ruth. So you've been to the cottage, Marigold, to help Dr. Janet? Good child!"

"Then that's where she pinched the new ribbon."

It was a sibilant whisper to Rachel. Miss Plowden wheeled round.

"What did you say? Repeat that, Ruth."

"N-nothing!" Ruth was frightened. "It was only my joke."

A silence had fallen on the kitchen. It was broken by the Deaconess.

"In very bad taste. You must tell Marigold you're sorry."

"All right." The hunchback's face was livid with temper. "I'm sorry—you great, fat thing!"

Marigold flushed to the roots of her hair. Instinctively, she straightened her body.

"Shut up!" Charlie shouted. But her eyes followed the others, in a measuring glance that passed over the old knitted jumper and ill-fitting skirt. "Putting on a bit

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of weight, though. Want more exercise, though it's difficult now tennis is over and you say it's too cold to swim. Never too cold for me!"

"You swim in ze winter?" Solange's arched brows went higher still. "You must be a por-poy!"

Never had Marigold been so thankful for one of her friend's mistakes, but in the laughter that followed she saw Amy draw Rachel aside. Heads together, they whispered in a corner. It was all up! She must tell Aunt Janet, get away. If she could. For the room was growing dim. In vain she fought against her increasing faintness, clutched the table, and knew a supporting arm, then no more. . . .

When she came to her senses she was lying on Janet's bed in the room next to Mrs. Brown's, the doctor's steady voice in her ears.

"It's all right." A pause, and the pillow raised. "Drink this, my dear."

Blindly, she obeyed, and gasped.

"Only sal volatile. I'd lie quiet for a little."

But this was beyond the girl's power.

"Do they know?" she whispered, and saw Janet nod.

"It doesn't matter. They had to, sooner or later. How do you feel now?"

"Better." Marigold's eyes filled with tears. "Miss Plowden?" she faltered.

"I didn't notice. There wasn't time to say much. Solange fetched me as I was seeing the Inspector off. You're not to cry. It's bad for your baby."

Marigold summoned her will-power, unaware that Janet had been troubled by the length of the faint.

"You're a better colour now," she said briskly. "These things often happen in your condition."

"I'm so sorry! I tried hard to last out."

"I know, but now it's over, and you can relax. You won't have to see the others. You're sleeping with me. Lucky there are two beds?"

It was the Abel's big room, for Mrs. Brown had chosen the one facing south.

"Yes." Marigold was still thinking of Miss Plowden. It would be so easy to say: "I'm married!" She wrestled with the temptation.

The window was open at the top and a sound caught

her attention, the far-off throb of the motor-boat, taking the Inspector back. It revived the thrill of vanished nights, and the leap of her pulse as she hurried down to the bathing-shed, to hear her lover's excited: "Goldie!" Betray him? Never!

"Can't I get up?" she asked Janet, and looked round the room. "Where are my clothes?"

"The kitchen was hot and they pulled off your jumper before I could reach you. Your belt too, unfortunately. Still, as I said, it doesn't matter, one way of breaking the news. I don't want you to stir about yet, but I'll fetch your nightdress and then you'll be more comfortable. You can have supper in bed. Who would you like to bring it? Mrs. Brown?"

"No, Solange, please."

"A good choice. She was the only one who kept her head, and she's fond of you. It's getting dark." Janet saw to the black-out and switched on the light. "Feel well enough to be left?"

"Rather! Tell me, Aunt Janet, who carried me in? Charlie?"

"No, Irene helped me. She seems to be a friend of yours." Janet's grey eyes twinkled. "I regret to say she boxed Ruth's ears!"

"How wizard! It was Ruth who began it."

"Spiteful little toad!"

Marigold smiled. That had done Aunt Janet good. But how tired she looked. Impulsively, the girl stretched out her hand.

"You're so sweet to me. This, on the top of everything!"

In response, Janet bent down and kissed her. She was hoping that in their closer intimacy the girl would confide in her fully, but it wasn't the moment to press for this.

"Get into bed when Solange comes. The sheets were clean this morning."

"As if I minded that!"

The door closed. All Marigold could hear now was the fret of the sea against the jetty. Had the Inspector taken her letter? Yes, Solange would have seen to it before Aunt Janet came to the kitchen. In another week she might hear from Piers. That was something to live for,

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a spur to her courage. And now she must think of her baby and keep calm, however hateful people were.

"Come in," she called, hearing a soft tap.

It was Madame Ducroy, her arms full, her face tender and mischievous.

"One leetle minute!" She closed the door. "'Ow do you feel, *chérie*?"

"Fine, though I'm not allowed up."

"Ze docteur is prudent. I bring your nightdress—your be-utiful nightdress! Like ze chemise in which ze nuns take zeir Saturday tub!"

"They don't?" Marigold asked incredulously, a weight lifted from her spirit, for Solange was just the same.

"But yes! It is ze rule, sinful to see ze body bare! I put zese down." The ugly hair-brush, comb, and an ancient bath-robe, with much the same feelings that Piers had experienced. "Now, do not move! Ze shoes first. You 'ave ze pretty feet, so small and white. Now ze kickers and vest and over go ze nightdress! 'Ere is a shawl for your shoulders. You must knit a white one for your baby, and zen we will sew ze little clo'es. Togeizzer by ze fire in ze so cold winter, and amuse ourselves." Solange turned her head. "'Ere is ze good Mrs. Brown to make ze ozzer bed."

"Good" did not agree with the old housekeeper's expression as she bustled in, the linen over her arm. She had expected to find Marigold alone, extract the full story and tell the child what she thought of her! Solange had foiled her, and even her back was aggressive as she passed between the two beds. Marigold felt a wild impulse to spank it. Instead, she asked in a small voice:

"Is it aired?"

"You can leave that to me," Mrs. Brown snapped. "They was both aired when the Doctor moved in. I know my duties—not like some!"

"Let me 'elp you?" Solange suggested soothingly, and went to the other side of the stripped mattress.

Mrs. Brown permitted this but, with ostentation, tucked in a corner of the sheet on the far side. No one could guess she was near to tears.

"Supper'll be late," she announced. "All of them in the refectory talking, with no one to give me a hand!"

A pointed hint to the Frenchwoman, who ignored it. "But it won't be the first time it's happened!"

With a last tug to the counterpane, wallowing in self-pity, she departed.

"Pheugh!" came from Marigold.

"She ees distressed, but it will pass," Solange responded calmly. "I am more sorree for Dr. Jeannette, wiz ze lady *cure* questioning 'er. A tongue as long as 'er nose! When ze docteur order zem out of ze kitchen she scream, 'I go to-morrow! I will not be spoke to like zat!'" Solange tittered. "And zen, 'eet is fonny, Amy say she will go wiz 'er, will not leave 'er 'alone in ze war!' Which was not what she want, poor lady!"

"She'll have Amy for life!" Marigold laughed, and yielded to her curiosity. "Did you guess about me, Solange?"

"Ziz afternoon as we meet, and ze wind play tricks wiz your skirt."

"Even before I told you of Piers? And you were so kind!"

"But *chérie*, I understan'. I 'ave 'ad a baby, a lover too, and wiz us we say: 'To love is to pardon.' Zat is what is wrong wiz ze women 'ere, zey are defeated. If you 'ad seen ze spectacle in ze kitchen!" Solange smiled broadly. "Irène, she take Amy and push 'er out, and Rachel ze leetle *bossue*, 'owling, for she 'ave a box—is zat right? From Irène. Somet'ing she call you zat puzzle me. Ees 'pastry' a bad word in zis country? But I tire you, *ma petite*?"

"I'm not a bit tired. Go on—what did Anna do?"

"Oh, Anna, she is *femme du monde*! You will 'ave no trouble zere. Miss Plowden, she do not believe it, and Anna take 'er away. All go, except Mrs. Brown, ze docteur and Irène." Solange looked pensive. "She surprise me. I t'ink 'er stupid before, but she is not so. She 'ave charity. Anozzer friend? See 'ow many you possess."

Marigold nodded. One name had been missing, besides the Gees, back at the farm.

"What became of Charlie?"

"She go out when Mrs. Brown say give you air. Sharlie is sensible. She catch you as you fall and lay you flat on ze floor. It is zen, when you do not revive, zat I fetch Dr. Jeannette."

Solange spoke lightly. She was not going to tell

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Marigold that the electrician had followed her, on the heels of the discovery, had gripped her wrist in the hall and launched an insult: "This is your doing, you French——!" An epithet new to Solange, but she had gathered the import, and returned it maliciously. She said now, with a tender expression:

"You will want ze suitable dresses. I 'ave 'orror when I see your skirt tied wiz a loop of tape! We must talk to Dr. Jeannette, order zem from London, somet'ing preety, for a change!"

"I wish she'd come back," Marigold said anxiously. "They're keeping her a long time."

"She go on to Mrs. Mappin, she tell me, and I am to stay 'ere, and not let anyone in."

A kindly equivocation, and Marigold's face cleared.

In the refectory Janet was on trial, for no one could forget that she had been in charge when this disgraceful thing occurred. A *man* on the island, every night for over a week! Anna and Miss Plowden, who looked ten years older, stood close at hand, whilst the Deaconess accused Janet of negligence:

"She should never have slept in the suite alone! When Mrs. Mappin went away before I saw to that myself. I can't understand how you allowed it?"

"It was Mrs. Mappin's orders. No one must use her room." Janet's voice was flat, fighting against fatigue. "I tried to make her change her mind, as I thought Marigold would be lonely, but she wouldn't listen to me."

"I can endorse that," said Miss Plowden. "I also, spoke to Mrs. Mappin, and when she said she disliked anyone in her bed I suggested that Marigold should have the room upstairs next to mine. Her reply was that I spoilt my pupil and would make her nervous. 'Hysterical' was the word she used. I should not have repeated this under the circumstances, but I cannot see Dr. Janet unfairly blamed. As to my share in the matter, I went in every night to lock the outer door, although the room was intolerably hot."

The Deaconess changed her tactics.

"That does not explain why Dr. Janet did not inform me at once when she knew that Marigold was—was——"

A hot patch on either cheek-bone, she paused, and Ruth finished the sentence, her eyes popping:

"In the family way."

"Be quiet!" Amy grasped her arm. "How dare you interrupt the Deaconess?"

"A little less talk is certainly desirable," that lady said coldly. "Well, Dr. Janet?"

"If you want to know my private reason I wished to consult Dr. McGregor first. He is coming to-morrow, and will, I hope, take the case. He will know how much Marigold can bear. From my own experience I should say that any further distress might result in a miscarriage. Therefore, I shall not allow anyone to see her without her doctor's permission."

"Except Madame Ducroy," Charlie called from the end of the room.

Heads were turned to note the speaker, and whispering began again.

"I have always mistrusted that influence." The Deaconess drew up her narrow head. "A Catholic, divorced! Why is she allowed in when I am not?"

"Because I can trust her to act with discretion." Janet was angry now. "And no one else! With the exception of you, Miss Plowden, but I know how distressed you are, and that Marigold would be the same, bad for her at the moment. Is there anything more you wish to know, Deaconess? Though I must remind you that you have no right to question my actions. During Mrs. Mappin's illness I am the head of the Castle, and would be in full charge if she passed away."

"But surely, you will *allow* me to ask"—the Deaconess's voice was ironical—"what steps you have taken on my young cousin's behalf to find the man in the case?"

"What steps do you recommend, having heard the full story? Marigold has refused to tell me his name."

"She must be made to do so."

"I thought you would say that. Whether ill or well, I presume?"

"She should be whipped like Polly!"

Janet looked at the hunchback, then her glance travelled round the rest of the faces, and she smiled.

"Do you wonder why I will allow none of you self-righteous and thoughtless women to see her? Now I must go to Mrs. Mappin."

Head high, she walked out of the room.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

Anna followed.

"Come here!" She drew Janet into the library, closed the door and seized the decanter. "Some left, thank God! Here's a clean glass. . . . Drink this—and blast the lot of them!"

"Clara will smell it," Janet protested, but obeyed, at the end of her strength.

"No matter. She likes a drop herself. You're not going to sit up with Mrs. Mappin to-night?"

"I don't want to." Janet sighed. "I shall have to tell Clara now."

"Let me do it? You can take her place, and we'll go into the tower room."

"Would you?" Janet looked relieved, and drained her glass. "I wanted to sleep with Marigold. The Deaconess was right on one point; we must find the man. I only hope he'll marry her! Before the baby comes."

"Why?" Anna asked coolly. "I don't see there's any hurry. Marriage after the event would legitimise the child, and you don't want to get a man who's fighting into trouble. You say he hasn't been told, so to him it's only a secret engagement, and you can't blame him for that, knowing what Mrs. Mappin is. I should let them alone. If it's genuine, he'll return on his next long leave." Reading Janet's face, she saw doubt, followed by temptation. "When is the baby expected?"

"Early in April."

"Then there's loads of time. Give the poor girl a chance! She has enough to bear, especially if he's an airman, the most likely guess. I think she's a little brick to screen him!" Scorn came into Anna's clear voice. "Really, the women here? You'd think it was the first war-baby they'd ever heard about, and the first girl who in the strain of parting with a man facing death gave him everything. But then I'm not a moral expert!"

"Nor am I," Janet said gravely. "But I feel my responsibility. Anyhow, I'll think it over. Thank you, my dear. I must go to Sybil now—and to Mrs. Brown, seething with the idea of 'having it out' with the child! By the way, she ought to have some help."

"I'll see to that. Irene, perhaps? She behaved well." They had reached the door and Anna opened it. Ruth shot away from the keyhole. "Listening again? Well,



when Mrs. Mappin dies you'll know the first guest to dismiss. That little pest!"

"Ssh!" Janet implored, as she watched Ruth clumping off to tell Rachel.

"That's the only way to deal with them," said Anna. "Give them a fright, and they'll knuckle under." A smile curved her mobile lips. "I say, Janet, did you hear Amy offer her services to the Deaconess, and see her expression?"

"I did!" Janet chuckled, approaching the suite. "The too-loving disciple?"

"She won't go, unfortunately. The Deaconess, I mean. She was livid when she heard of the bombs on the Firth of Forth, but she thinks this coast is safe. Now, send Clara to me in Marigold's room—I beg her pardon, Nurse Parr! By the way, she'll look ahead and see another cushy job to get her out of housework. Nurse to the baby?"

"Yes. She'll be no trouble," Janet agreed, smiling, and opened Sybil's door.

Her opinion was confirmed. After the first shock Clara took the news with the philosophy of her calling. These accidents happened, even in good families, and Marigold had been kept under too much. Anna agreed, and suggested that Clara should take duty to-night and set Dr. Janet free.

"Then I'll have a sleep now," Nurse Parr decided. "And come on at ten. The Deaconess could sit with Mrs. Mappin meanwhile. Something for her to do! Will you tell Mrs. Brown I shall want some more tea? The caddy's empty, and I'd like another novel. I couldn't get through *Gone With the Wind*. A funny title?" Clara tittered. "Made me think of Maclean's Powder!"

So the Deaconess was whipped in, much to her distaste, since it meant supper on a tray in the lingering scent of lysol, and ministering to the sick woman's needs. Clara went to bed, and the Castle settled down to whispering in corners, Rachel the most venomous. She could not forget the long years, those occasions when her commercial traveller, warmed by good food, would propose to "finish the evening properly," and her flesh yearned for him. Now that chit of a child had a lover and was expecting a baby! It wasn't fair. Why should she be satisfied when Rachel's own virtue went unrewarded?

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

Amy was thinking resentfully that Marigold would have every chance in her position, with plenty of money. They'd probably bribe the doctor and nurse and call it a "mis-carriage"! Privilege, again. If only Mrs. Mappin were herself and could vent her wrath on her daughter! It would serve Marigold right, but Dr. Janet was playing her own hand, looking forward to being mistress here. Instead of the Deaconess, a near relation. Could she be persuaded to leave, taking Amy with her—as a "lady-companion"? She mustn't live alone, was too nervous, like all her class. Perhaps the German bombers would come again, this time nearer than the Shetlands. Pet-tishly, Amy pushed away Ruth, who was leaning against her.

Meanwhile, Madame Ducroy, honey-tongued, had persuaded Mrs. Brown to allow her to make an omelet (large enough for two!) as Marigold didn't fancy cold mutton. No wonder, the Frenchwoman thought, lifting a lid to inspect the next course, a boiled and pallid roly-poly. Assuredly, it was "pôu-dings" that made the British so virtuous!

Supper passed in a gloomy silence, but Janet's work was not over. Warning Madame Ducroy to remain on guard she slipped out of the tower door. There was no moon, but the sky above was clear, and presently, she extinguished her torch, her eyes accustomed to the starlight. It was imperative that Mrs. Gee, who had not come up to supper, should hear the story from her own lips.

The farmer opened the back door, surprised to see the visitor. Was Mrs. Mappin worse?

"No," Janet told her. "But there's trouble, and I wanted to see you alone."

"Then I'll send Polly to bed. Come in, Doctor, and sit you down. It's cold to-night."

She hustled Polly off and stirred up the dying fire. Over it Janet told her what had happened, watching Mrs. Gee's face darken and hearing her ominous clucks. At the end she broke out:

"It's a judgment on Mrs. Mappin! I've never forgotten the cruel way she treated my Polly. With no reason," she added proudly. "There's nothing wrong with her. But I'd never have thought it of Marigold, that she'd forget herself like that! So young, too." She stared into the

hot embers. "She was kept too strict, and when they break out they're the worst." Her blue eyes, anxious, came round to Janet's face. "Will the man marry her?"

"He ought to, but I don't know who he is. Marigold won't tell me."

"That's always the way, they won't give a name. 'Twas the same with my cousin's youngest girl, until it was too late and he'd gone away and no one could find him. I expect it's one of those flying men that worked on the Ram. I kept an eye on Polly then, but she'd learnt her lesson." Mrs. Gee sighed profoundly. "There's days when I think it's all wrong, that every girl should have her chance. I didn't when I come here, but now I don't know."

Half an hour later Janet stood with the good soul at the gate, relieved in her mind. Mrs. Gee had agreed that their duty was to see the child brought safely into the world. As to the others, spiteful old maids, they'd have to behave themselves, though the Deaconess was a problem. She'd preach and preach and interfere, with that Army making things worse. Mrs. Gee was a fighter, had "stood up to" her husband for years, and the thought of championship moved her.

"You let Marigold stay with us for a bit?" she suggested. "It will keep her out of the others' way. I've always been fond of the child, and you can trust me. We'll have to come up for dinner, but we'll leave directly after, and have supper here, as we often do in the winter. It won't hurt her to miss her lessons. She can feed the fowls and help in the dairy, though not to tire her. I shan't pretend I approve, but I'm not one to run down a woman in trouble, certainly not a girl of her age brought up to know nothing of men." Her blue eyes became sly. "The Deaconess has never called here since she tried to teach me my business."

"Excellent!" Janet smiled back. "It's very good of you, Mrs. Gee, and Marigold couldn't be in better hands. I've so much to do that I can't be always with her. If it hadn't been for Madame Ducroy I couldn't have got out this evening. A kind and helpful woman."

"You don't think, being *French*——" Mrs. Gee insinuated.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"Nothing to do with it. It started on Marigold's birthday and Madame Ducroy had only just come." Janet chaffed her: "You're as bad as the Deaconess! Who thinks she's dangerous, because she divorced her husband, a thoroughly bad man."

"Ah," Mrs. Gee brought out. "She's been through it."

"Yes, and learnt compassion, like you." Leaning on the rail, Janet drew herself up. "I must get back. Marigold is sleeping in my room. Dr. McGregor is coming to-morrow and must see her, so shall we say the day after for her visit? Not too soon?"

"Suits me, doctor. I'll have her room ready, the one opposite mine. Perhaps she'd better have her own mattress? Charlie could bring it on the barrow, her bed-clothes too, as we're short of extra blankets. It's a frost to-night."

"And you'll be catching cold, so go in, and God bless you! You've been a real friend, and Marigold will be safe here."

"One minute!" Mrs. Gee looked up into Janet's tired face. "You ought to rest, you look worn-out. But tell me this. Do you think Mrs. Mappin will recover?"

"Candidly, no. She's weaker than she was and I shouldn't be surprised any moment if she slipped out. But she doesn't suffer, thank God, knows nothing." Janet's face was sad. "The body's alive, and that's all."

"A mercy," the older woman said, and lingered. "You don't think Marigold will do my Polly any harm? That's just occurred to me."

"I'm sure she won't. She hasn't an evil thought in her head, is curiously innocent still. It surprises me sometimes. She looks forward to the baby and talks of it, as if she were a married woman."

"She isn't, I suppose?" Mrs. Gee asked sharply.

"How could she be, on this island?"

"He might have taken her off in the motor-boat. That's how he came."

"In the middle of the night? No registry would be open, and besides, you have to give notice. The same would apply to a minister. Easier to fly away with her!" She saw Mrs. Gee start. "What is it?"

"I was just remembering. A plane came over in the summer, then turned back, and flew so low I was afraid

## THE ISLAND

it would hit the roof. Marigold was on the cliff. I'm wondering if the pilot saw her and that was the man?"

"It might be. But my idea is that he was on that hush-hush job and thought it would be a lark to explore the island, knowing it was forbidden. You're shivering! Go in at once, you naughty woman!"

Janet turned down the path, pausing to pick up a bow of ribbon, the one Marigold had lost and replaced, with such dire results. It was strange that one of her old patients had come to the rescue, Janet thought, with a sudden twinge of regret for her lost profession. She would have liked to have brought Marigold's child into the world, the second generation, but passing the swimming pool it occurred to her that she had succeeded in what mattered most: no one would connect Sybil's illness now with the scandal engrossing the Castle. Not even Marigold herself. Poor child! She had quite enough to face without that burden on her soul.

Janet's thought took a fresh course. What would Michael think of this strange romance? She remembered his main objection to the rules drawn up by Sybil, and could picture him at his worst, delighted that Nature had won, definitely on Marigold's side. A good thing he wasn't here! But how she would love to see him, and talk it all over. Janet looked up at the starry sky with a queer feeling of loneliness, then shook it off, to say under her breath:

"I mustn't tell him, but what a play he would make of it! *The Island Forbidden to Man.*"

## CHAPTER XIII

MARIGOLD settled down happily at the farm, after Polly's first reaction to her presence. It swung between sullen mistrust and curiosity, which Mrs. Gee noticed, and forbade any mention of the past, a veto welcomed by the younger girl, already suffering from disillusion, for Charlie had cast her off. Meeting the electrician on her way to the bathroom in the suite, Marigold had wished her good morning, to receive no response.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

Charlie had marched past, ignoring her stunned expression. It was the same at meals. Between Janet and Anna, with Madame Ducroy facing her, the girl noticed that Charlie never looked her way. At the farm she could bear the strain no longer. Was Charlie hurt by being kept in the dark after their close friendship? Rising early, Marigold went down to waylay the electrician at the swimming pool, and saw her striding along, a towel thrown over her shoulder. Mustering her courage, the girl stepped down from the bathing-shed.

"Are you vexed with me, Charlie?" she asked.

"I don't want to speak to you." The face under the dark hood looked pinched this morning, but Charlie hardened her heart. "You know why. Creeping down here at night to meet that dirty dog!"

"He isn't!" Marigold's eyes flashed. She could have borne condemnation of herself, but not this insult to Piers. "You've no right—you don't know him! And when he returns——"

"Don't pride yourself on that," Charlie interrupted rudely. "I know what those airmen are!"

"Who told you he was an airman?"

"There was no one else about." The jealous desire to wound drove her on. "Unless it was Polly's fisherman as wanted a change!"

"You're disgusting!" Marigold cried. "Pretending to be my friend and then going over to the other side directly I'm in trouble!"

"Well, you've still got your precious Frenchie, and morals don't count with her. I'd never ha' guessed you'd *lower* yourself like this!"

"That's all you know!" The girl bit back the words on her tongue, and looked at Charlie darkly. "You'll be sorry for this one day."

"Turning me out, eh? When your ma dies. I don't care! I'd get a better job in the war and be paid for it! Has that occurred to you?" Charlie leaned forward threateningly. "Like me to go now?"

"And leave Aunt Janet in the lurch? That's a nice idea! I'll never speak to you again." Marigold turned away, her cheeks scarlet, to hide the tears that threatened her. Over her shoulder she cried, "Go back to Ruth and Amy! They're your sort!"

She went rapidly through the wood, blind to the rabbits in the warren that scattered before her. In the farmyard she met Mrs. Gee, who looked at her enquiringly.

"You're out early, my dear. Anything wrong?"

"Yes, Charlie!" It was a relief to unburden her soul and see the older woman's disgust. "I've always believed in her!"

"And spoilt her," said Mrs. Gee. "Taking her out of her place. Jealous, that's what she is, and common! I said so from the first. You let her alone; that's the best punishment. And now come and have your breakfast. Polly's brought you in two brown eggs."

The next covert attack came from Rachel. Asked to make a new skirt for Marigold she said she couldn't cut it out, her hand too bad; "racked with rheumatism," her expression. Janet examined it, asked a few questions, and prescribed a meatless diet. Rachel, no vegetarian, was soon able to use the scissors, but meanwhile, Solange had procured a paper pattern and attacked the bale of serge in the stores. Tacking the seams together, she tried the skirt on the girl and then turned the sewing over to Rachel, a bitter moment for the dressmaker. Solange was present at the final fitting, unripped the crooked hem and said sweetly, "It ees your poor 'and. 'Ow you suffer! But keep to ze pins and it will 'ang."

That had been fun. Quite otherwise was Marigold's meeting with Miss Plowden, who had called at the farm with some books whilst Mrs. Gee was milking. She had said very little, the result of profound thought, but she left the girl under the impression that duty had taken the place of love in the older woman's heart. Although she did not agree with the Deaconess in her desire for drastic punishment, Miss Plowden thought Marigold's friends too indulgent, and bitterly disappointed in her pupil pointed out that no one could respect her now. She must reveal the name and the whereabouts of the unknown man, in justice to the coming child, and pray to God for His forgiveness. Since the girl showed no signs of yielding Miss Plowden left her to think it over.

Meanwhile, the Deaconess could be constantly seen trudging up to the Pirate's Rock in the hope of meeting the sinner. This became Polly's joke: "There she is again, Old Nosey!" Marigold kept to the farm and the fields

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

beyond it, helped the Gees, and when the weather was too bad sat by the fire in the pleasant kitchen, knitting a jumper and dreaming of Piers.

On the first Wednesday of her visit Mrs. Gee was late and Marigold impatient, for the launch must be back. When they entered the refectory half the company was seated. Marigold's eyes sought Madame Ducroy's and caught the faint shake of her head. No letter! There was still the chance of a printed message and as soon as the meal was over she slipped into the library, where now the copies of *The Times* were laid. Solange followed her into the empty room, knowing her anxiety, saw her scan the Personal Column, and relief in her face that turned to perplexity.

"I don't understand!" She looked up at her friend. "It starts in French. Look!"

Solange approached and read the lines, beginning with a large G.

*"Ecrivez-moi, princesse lointaine. All is well, bar weather here. Still delayed unavoidably. Jet'adore. B.-M."*

"He can't have received my letter," Marigold murmured.

"Because he is in France! Zat leaps to ze eye." Solange was smiling. "Don't you see? 'Princess far away'? 'E is clevaire, zat one. Psst!" The door was opening, and she turned the paper over. "I enjoy ze pictures, so well shot. Your Queen, she is lovely, but I do not admire 'er 'at. You agree wiz me, Anna?"

"I'm afraid I'm no judge," said the newcomer, smiling. "Marigold, the Gees have gone and the Deaconess is on the prowl, so I'll walk up with you to the farm. If you like?"

"Good! We'll slip out through the tower door. What about you, Solange?"

"I stay in ze warm." Solange shivered. "Still, we cannot complain." She looked meaningly at the girl. "My bruzzer write zere is snow in France, and 'eavy rain. A mercy, as ze fighting 'ave stop."

"I don't expect the Germans now will make a big attack until the Spring," Anna said thoughtfully, wondering why Marigold seemed so much brighter than at dinner. "I'll



fetch my coat. Stay here with Solange; I can hear the flat-footed step that belongs to the Church!"

"She ees naughty!" Solange cried, and lowered her voice. "You are 'appy now, *ma petite*? Soon 'e will write." Mischief shone in her eyes, and she quoted, "'*Ecrivez-moi*,' zen '*Je t'adore*!' I am please 'e *tutoie* you at ze last!"

"We don't use 'thou,' only the Quakers," Marigold defended Piers. "But that big G means something!"

"And ze B.-M.? I can guess! *Baise-moi*!" Solange announced triumphantly.

Here Anna reappeared.

"I'm ready! Where's your cape?"

The girl drew it round her, and they went out into the hall, to see the Deaconess descending the stairs.

"Marigold!" she called imperiously. "I want to speak to you."

"Afraid I've no time now, Cousin Selina. Mrs. Gee is expecting me."

"Mrs. Gee can wait."

But already the pair had reached the arched door. Exasperated, the Deaconess saw it close. If only Sybil would come to her senses! This place was going from bad to worse.

Outside in the cold, damp air Anna said casually:

"I'd forgotten it was Wednesday. What about your carpentering lesson?"

"I've given it up. Charlie has joined the enemy."

"I expected that. It's very natural; she feels you've been stolen from her. Still, it gives you more time, and I'm going to ask a favour. Will you sit to me for a sketch in crayon? Your head, that's all. I'd like to try my hand at it, if Mrs. Gee will let me come to the farm."

"I'm sure she will." The girl was surprised and pleased. "Though I don't feel very beautiful!"

"That's my look-out," Anna told her mischievously. "It mayn't be a success, but if it is you could give it to Dr. Janet at Christmas. Or that man of yours when he turns up."

"That would be perfect! He has those snap-shots you took of me." Rather shyly, Marigold went on, "You'd like him, Anna. He's fond of pictures, with some good ones at home."

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

Had she said too much? Anna read the thought in her face.

"And now I'm supposed to ask my dealer for the names of all those who possess old masters? You needn't worry, my dear. If there's one thing I hate it's to interfere in other people's lives. You've enough to do, increasing the birth-rate, without being pestered by questions, so whatever you say will go no further with me. Understand?"

"I do; you're a dear! Between Aunt Janet and Miss Plowden I'm almost afraid to speak! They're frightfully good to me, but I won't tell them who Piers is"—a slip—"and get him into trouble. Would you, if he were fighting?"

"No. Although he'd want to protect you. If he is a man."

"He's that all right," Marigold said so seriously that Anna repressed a chuckle. "That's one nice thing about Mrs. Gee, she lets me alone." A dimple showed in her cheek. "Though she said yesterday, 'It will be a race between your baby and the new calf.' I wish I could tell Peter that! You don't know how lovely it was, Anna, to have someone young to laugh with! I don't mean——" She broke off, confused.

"You needn't try to flatter me!" Anna told her. "I shall never see forty again. I don't regret it, though I wish I'd started painting earlier and learnt more in my father's time. I was hoping this autumn to paint on the mainland, but if your mother recovers someone will be sure to tell her, and I don't want to make it harder for Dr. Janet. So I've given up asking, and shall try my hand at a few heads. I'd like to sketch Mrs. Gee." She saw the girl's surprise. "It's a face full of wisdom, beautiful in its way. And look at the life she's led! A brutal husband and a half-witted child." Anna asked abruptly, "How does Polly treat you?"

"She's all right, though I feel rather mean. She was beaten for a few words with a fisherman, and I'm let off!" They were climbing the path to the farm and Marigold loosened the heavy cape. "P-Peter wouldn't believe it! But that was why he was so anxious to keep our engagement secret. He thought mother was mad. Poor mother!"

So his real name was Piers, Anna decided, noting the

slight stammer. Unusual; probably, a family one. It was safe with her. They had reached the farm where Mrs. Gee, her skirt turned up under an apron, was sweeping the yard.

"I've brought the Prodigal back," Anna greeted her. "Don't you ever rest, Mrs. Gee?"

"Not often while the light lasts. Polly gave the cowshed a turn-out this morning and there's straws all over the place! You must have a lay down, Marigold, you're flushed. Go now, there's a good girl." She listened to Anna's request. "Of course you can, should make a pretty picture. In the parlour, I suggest, as we won't be in and out. So if you'll say the time I'll put a match to the fire."

"Which way does it look?" Anna asked, relieved to hear the north. "That will be fine. Would ten suit you to-morrow?"

"Yes, well." The farmer looked round to see that Marigold had gone in. "Something to keep her still. She's restless, but it takes some that way." Leaning on her broom she became confidential. "A sad pity, though it's no good fretting over broken eggs. I'm hoping her mother will go first. She's always been hard on the child. Mine too, and the Lord never forgets."

Nor you, Anna thought, and nodded.

"If Marigold's sketch turns out well I'd like to do one of you."

"Me?" The blue eyes opened wide. "You'd have a hard task with my wrinkles!"

"Not so many, and I like them, signs of character that one misses in the young. Their experience lies before them."

"That's true," Mrs. Gee agreed. "We none of us can escape from trouble in this life, as I tell my Polly when she grumbles, and it all depends on the way we face it. Though I'd like her to have a little more pleasure. She's getting on, missing her chance of marriage, and now her health's so much better I sometimes wonder if I'm right keeping her in this lonely place. What do you think about it, Anna?"

"I should wait until the war was over." Anna was doubtful of Polly's progeny. "I don't think Mrs. Mappin is here for long and the rules may be relaxed with Dr.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

Janet in charge. That's something to look forward to. By-the-bye, I promised to dust the cottage. Could you lend me a duster?"

"If you're sure to return it? The way they vanish!" Mrs. Gee deplored, and heard Anna chuckle.

"I know! I'm always forgetting and using one for a paint rag! But I promise to bring yours back." She watched the farmer go to the line, unpeg a veteran, and reluctantly pass it over. "That's very good of you. I won't forget."

"I'll be sure to remind you," Mrs. Gee declared, with twinkling eyes. "I hate asking Mrs. Mappin for new ones. But there, she can't count them now, poor soul!"

Anna was glad in the strange events next day that she had left the cottage clean and tidy. That evening when Janet thanked her she suggested:

"Why don't you have your sleep there to-morrow? It would do you good to get away from this place. Slip down and take some sandwiches. We'll look after Marigold at dinner."

"I might." Janet was tempted. "They could always fetch me. But keep an eye on the Deaconess. Her latest idea is that Marigold should put up her hair! Plaits indecent with a baby?" She enjoyed Anna's expression. "Typical, isn't it?"

"Quite. You should have quoted St. Paul, who believed in braids! I'm going up to sketch Marigold in the morning, so I'll light your kitchen fire and leave some milk for your tea. Anything else you want?"

"No, thank you, my dear. I'm longing for a good rest, but here people interrupt it." Sure of her friend's sympathy, Janet continued, "It would be easier if I were in full command, but those damned women take advantage of Sybil's condition. I'm the Regent, no more! Clara is a great help, though she wants a lot of waiting upon, and Mrs. Brown rebels. Between ourselves, I'm paying her. She didn't come here to nurse."

"I think you're wise. There is nothing more trying than being constantly under a favour." The last rays of the setting sun touched a silver streak in Janet's hair, with the contrast of her dark brows, and Anna cried, "I'd like to sketch you, just as you are!"

"Don't be absurd! My day's over."

It had never begun, Anna decided as she turned away, remembering Janet's broken career and long service to Sybil, dealing with her tempestuous moods. Even now she could not write, the new book abandoned. A woman in a thousand, who could love with her heart and her brain, Yet—Anna scowled—so often in life passed by for a pretty fool, appealing in her helplessness. Men did not seek their equals, she thought, with a rare recurrence of bitterness, but someone to magnify the male's sense of superiority. This had been her own fate, doomed to platonic friendship where her heart was involved.

The weather in the night turned balmy, one of those fleeting reversions to summer known in the Western Isles. There were patches of blue sky between fleecy clouds when Anna reached the farm and found Marigold waiting. The girl proved a good sitter, relieved to learn she need not be dumb, and could stretch her limbs when they were stiff. Anna abandoned the first attempt, but was satisfied with the second, so far as it went, but now Marigold looked tired. They walked to the cottage with the bottle of milk, arranging to meet the Gees at dinner.

Miss Plowden took Janet's place, facing the Deaconess, and the meal proceeded. It had reached the second course when there came a startling interruption, the loud clang of the front door bell.

"Whoever can that be?" the Deaconess exclaimed. "Not another inspector, surely? Sit down, Marigold!" she added sharply.

Too late, for the girl had already reached the door. It slammed behind her, and Miss Plowden, frowning, looked at Anna.

"I'd let her alone," she murmured, anxious to give the lovers a chance, for the same thought was in every mind.

"Yes, now she's gone," the governess agreed, with a vision of the community at her heels. She addressed the Deaconess. "Of course an inspector would come just as poor Dr. Janet was having a rest before her night duty. I expect Mrs. Brown is there by now."

"I hope so. Marigold should not have gone to the door."

In the pause that followed, Charlie's whisper to Rachel was plainly heard:

"If it is, I'll wring his bloody neck!"

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"Disgraceful!" Selina reared up her own. "Using language like that! You forget yourself, Charlotte. I'm surprised at you. Oh, thank you, Amy!" A dish had come over her shoulder. "I'll take a little more rice pudding."

She was keeping her head, Anna saw with relief.

"You like it?" Madame Ducroy asked sweetly. "I put in a vanilla pod. Wizout zis it is faded. Good for ze digestion, but not exciting. For myself, I prefaire caramel, but we must be careful wiz ze sugar. Anozzer way . . ."

Her voice rippled on, revealing culinary secrets, to everyone's annoyance, ears strained for a sound outside. But no one had the courage to stop her. The Deaconess, distracted, interposed, "Yes, yes," and frowned, for she was a trifle deaf.

"I think," she got in when Solange's breath failed. "I must go and see——"

"There she is!" Amy, passing the window, halted. "On the cliff. With a man!"

Nothing now could restrain the others. They rushed to peer at the distant couple.

"Going to the cottage," Ruth piped, as Rachel broke out:

"Letting him in! Openly, before our faces!"

Anna had quietly slipped to the door, determined that Charlie should not pass her, and Miss Plowden joined the Deaconess at the farther window.

"It's all for the best," she murmured. "He must marry her."

But the Deaconess would not listen.

"The impertinence!" she fumed. "Coming here without permission, although he knows the Rule. It confirms what I thought of him! Marigold too. Taking him off to Dr. Janet, as if the island belonged to her!"

"She couldn't very well bring him here," Miss Plowden said mildly. "Hadn't we better go back to the table?"

The pair had drifted out of sight and the room buzzed, everyone regretting that Amy had not seen the intruder sooner. Little could be gained from their first impression of his back, in well-cut tweeds, the shape of his head disguised by the soft felt hat, but Miss Plowden had noticed that although he was tall and erect he did not walk with

the springy step of youth. Marigold had evinced no excitement by his side, a little space between them. It did not suggest a lovers' meeting.

"Come," the Deaconess ordered, moving to her chair. "We must finish dinner, and then you can clear away. Ah, here's Mrs. Brown!" For Anna had admitted her, with a quick glance that detected amusement on the housekeeper's face, aware of the crowd at the window. "You didn't go to the door when the bell rang?"

"I was busy, Deaconess, and Marigold got there first."

"Then you don't know who the—er—caller is?"

"A gentleman for Dr. Janet." Mrs. Brown heard the hiss of surprise that greeted this, like steam escaping from a kettle, and prolonged the suspense. "On business, I gathered. So Marigold took him to the cottage. They passed my kitchen and she stopped to explain."

"His name?" the Deaconess demanded.

"I didn't catch it, but I'd seen him before, in Dr. Mappin's time, and if I remember it was Chate."

"Chaytor!" Anna exclaimed, and turned to Miss Plowden. "You know, Michael Chaytor, the playwright. He's a friend of Janet's publishers and looks after her interests there."

"Why did you let him pass, Mrs. Brown, without informing me?" the Deaconess asked severely.

"He didn't ask for you, and seeing Dr. Janet was in bed and would have to get up, it seemed quicker for him to wait there. It was Marigold's idea," Mrs. Brown said huffily.

"Ah! Just as I thought. She's getting thoroughly out of hand. Being spoilt by people who should know better. Will you send her to me at once when she returns, Mrs. Brown?"

One of the housekeeper's peculiarities was that she always took a general remark as being directed against herself.

"Afraid I can't, Deaconess. She asked me to tell Mrs. Gee"—here she looked at the latter—"that she'd go straight on to the farm." Mrs. Brown sniffed. "Glad of a little quiet, I should say!"

This catechism had been the last straw, and she was definitely on the girl's side.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

Nevertheless, the scene at the cottage would have shocked her. Marigold, leaving the visitor in the kitchen to gaze at the wonderful view, had run up to the bedroom and tapped.

"It's only me," she began, relieved to find Janet awake. "There's nothing wrong, but I've brought someone to see you, smuggled him through! Luckily, I went down to the bell. An old friend of yours—and how nice he is! Michael Chaytor."

"What!" Janet shot up in bed, dismay on her face. "You don't mean he's here?"

"Yes!" Marigold giggled. "Another man on the island? They'll have fits when they know! Here's your dressing-gown—put it on—and your slippers. He's quite happy, so take your time."

"But why on earth has he come? I must dress!"

"Nonsense! I told him you were in bed, and no one will see you; I'm going to keep guard on the cliff. Darling Aunt Janet, why shouldn't you have a little fun?" By now the latter was running a comb distractedly through her hair. "Put some scent on your hanky." Marigold lifted the stopper of the cut-glass bottle and sniffed. "It smells lovely! He's devoted to you, was so angry when he heard you were doing night nursing. Have you got any beer here? Men like beer."

"Oh, go away!" Janet cried between laughter and wrath, tying the cord of her Paisley dressing-gown, speed her object. She must send him away.

"That's right. This little curl"—Marigold arranged it—"now you look fine, so I'll be off."

"Don't slip on those stairs." Janet had recovered herself. "And you're not to hang about on the cliff."

"Then I'll go back to the farm," Marigold called over her shoulder. "You've a man to protect you!" She could see Michael through the open scullery door, watching her. "Hasn't she, Mr. Chaytor?"

"Yes, shaking in his shoes! Shall I have to take on the whole pack at once? This is a desperate adventure." He lifted the latch of the outer door. "Aren't you going to say good-bye to me?"

Marigold's hand clasped his, her face suddenly wistful, for she had hoped the visitor would be Piers.

"Good luck!" she breathed, and was gone.



With a puzzled expression, Michael turned to Janet, who had entered the kitchen.

"That's a charming girl! Now I'm to be scolded, I suppose?"

"You shouldn't have done it," Janet said severely. "You know how I'm placed. Why couldn't you write?"

"Because I'm sick of letters. I've been worrying about you ever since you told me of Mrs. Mappin's stroke. I felt you were keeping something from me." His brown eyes studied her face, and noted the strain in it. "You're killing yourself!" he said abruptly.

"You mean I'm looking older?" Janet smiled. "If it comes to that, so are you! Sit down, though you mustn't stay. Here, where you can see the view. That's one of my joys in life."

"I don't wonder. But you aren't here often, so Marigold told me." He was still standing close to her, and into his keen, sensitive face came an expression she recognised, both wise and tender. "Is she one of your secret troubles, my dear?"

"Then you've guessed?" She saw him nod. "Isn't it dreadful? So young!" She bit her lip, shaken, feeling his sympathy enfold her. "Oh, Michael, I can't bear it!"

The restraint of years broke down. She was in his arms, her face hidden on his breast, the clean, peaty scent of tweed in her nostrils. Someone strong to lean against. . . .

He let her cry, staring over her head at the loch.

"That's better," he said at last. His hand under her chin he raised it and gently kissed her lips, then feeling her response let himself go. Flushed, incredulous, she whispered:

"All this time?"

"From the very first! But I thought it was hopeless." A whimsical smile curved his mouth. "Do you remember the lion at the Zoo? And that night after the theatre? But I'm not going to have you sacrificed for a pack of lunatics. It must stop!"

She was surprised by the way he said it, no longer mistrustful of himself. The years had strengthened him, body and soul. She found herself asking meekly:

"Do you know my age?"

At this he smiled.

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"Three years less than mine. In the prime of life? And even your Deaconess can't object, now I'm a widower." Janet's grey eyes had widened. "I didn't tell you, but my wife was drowned early this summer in a storm on Lake Como. She insisted on being rowed across to dine at a villa, and they saw the boat founder, from the pier. Let's sit down. That chair looks comfortable. Big enough for two!" He put her into it and settled himself on the arm. "I like your hair with that white streak; it's distinguished. And this Paisley thing, but not the pyjamas." He was amused by her swift movement to cover them. "When you marry me please get some nightdresses. Pretty ones!"

"You're mad! I can't possibly leave Sybil."

Michael looked at her sombrely. The old story of invincible loyalty.

"I don't want to sound unfeeling, but will it be long?" he asked.

"I don't think so. She's weaker, and I'm hoping she'll slip away."

"Without knowing about her daughter?"

"She does know. That's how it happened, but I managed to keep it a secret, even from Marigold. It didn't seem fair that she should have it on her conscience, when it might have happened at any moment in one of poor Sybil's violent tempers." Janet told him the facts briefly. "Do you think I did right?"

"Absolutely." He looked at her with wonder. "My God, you've been through it, with all this on your shoulders! How did the child get like that?" He turned his head sharply. "There's someone tapping?"

Janet sprang up, looking as guilty as a schoolgirl, he thought with amusement, as he followed her.

"Let me." Cautiously, he opened the door. "Oh, it's you!"

"I'm so sorry to disturb you," Marigold said breathlessly. "But I remembered you'd nothing for tea." She was carrying a loaded basket. "Scones and butter, a cake and two new-laid eggs. Will that do?"

"Scrumptious!" said Michael, thinking how innocent she looked. "Hullo! There's another girl!"

"It's Polly, our farmer's daughter. Mrs. Gee wouldn't let me come alone, and she wanted to have a peep at you."

I wonder, *would* you be kind and speak to her? She never sees a man."

"Rather!" Michael, smiling, passed through the porch. He had often been held up for an autograph, but this was a stranger experience, for when he reached the gate Polly retreated.

On the cliff she stopped, looked furtively round her, and beckoned to him.

Marigold placed the food on the table and turned to Janet, with the traces of tears on her face, and happiness in her eyes.

"You were nice to him?" she asked anxiously. "But you won't leave me before my baby comes?"

"You needn't be afraid of that. Don't get silly ideas into your head," Janet said, clutching at her dignity.

"You can't deceive me, I know what love is. But I'll keep it to myself. If he *can't* wait you could be married and live here. In this cottage, I mean." Her voice became enthusiastic. "It would be so nice for Peter when he returns to have another man to talk to. Ssh! He's coming back."

Michael entered, looking baffled.

"I couldn't understand her. She said: 'Don't let Dr. Janet be beaten'!"

"Because Polly was," Marigold explained. "For talking to a fisherman on the jetty. That's mother's rule, but Aunt Janet got me out of it, the darling! I've been thinking, you'd better wait till they're all at tea in the kitchen and go out through the tower door. They won't expect you that way. Aunt Janet will show you. I'm going now." In the porch she turned, a dimple in her cheek. "Come back soon, Uncle Michael!"

He closed the door, and gave way to his mirth.

"I'm glad your relations approve of me. But was that true?" He frowned, "Beaten?"

"Yes. I tried to prevent it."

"I should think so, indeed." Michael saw the weariness had returned to her face, and changed the subject. "Those eggs look good!"

"Are you hungry?"

"Ravenous!"

"You poor dear!" Janet was stricken. "Haven't you had any dinner?"

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"No, but don't worry. The bus took so long, and then finding a boat, that I didn't go to the inn. I wanted to get to you."

"And I never thought of it! I'll put the kettle on at once for some tea. Come and see my scullery-bathroom?"

Michael followed her, admiring her figure in the closely-wrapped dressing-gown.

"This is great! What's upstairs?" He listened. "Just right, the infectious ward for my dressing-room! I've always wanted to live in a cottage. A cottage with chromium taps. Where does that door lead to?"

"The wood-shed,"—she smiled—"etcetera!"

"That's a relief to my mind. No long walk to a rustic bower in the pouring rain?"

"No! You can explore the garden, if you like, whilst I get tea ready."

Still smiling, she laid the table with a cloth, which she rarely used. If only what he suggested could come true how happy they could be together. He could write whilst she was busy at the Castle, or read on the little terrace, then bring the wider world to her, man's talk, missed for so long. Impossible! She sighed. Her duty to Sybil, living or dead, must come first. Presently, she saw him, peering in at the window, and flung it up.

"How do you like your eggs boiled?" she asked.

"Just set. But I don't care! This must be delightful in summer, to sit out here and forget the war." He leaned his elbows on the sill. "I'm not going to let you leave the island when the Germans start in earnest. How long your eyelashes are! Do you know, I think you're better-looking than ever. This is draughty for you! I'll come in."

She should not escape him again, he told himself, although he might have to wait. She would want to see that girl over her trouble. He wondered when the baby was due and the first thing he said at the table was:

"You haven't told me about Marigold yet. When did the immaculate conception occur, and who was the visiting angel?"

"Early in July, and hardly an angel! She won't tell me who he is—that's part of the trouble—but I'm convinced it was an airman from the station near Muss." Janet handed Michael his cup. "Start your egg, and you shall

hear all about it. He arrived on her seventeenth birthday, swam ashore from a little island called the 'Ram.'"

Michael listened in silence, well content. Watching his face, she saw his interest quicken, with flashes of humour, until an air she recognised took possession of him, both concentrated and visionary. She was not surprised in the pause that followed when he said:

"Extraordinary! It would make a book. Those two young creatures, and their excitement when they found each other, mentally and physically. You can't blame the man; he was tried beyond his strength. As to the girl, she is delightful! A child of Nature."

"What worries me is she's not in the least ashamed of it."

"My dear Janet," Michael said impatiently. "Was Eve ashamed until the serpent put convention into her head, and told her that nakedness was a sin? Remember, this Peter was the first man she had met since she was six, a being from another world, probably an airman, a winged messenger of love. How could the girl resist him?" He smiled suddenly. "An expert in wooing, too! I've a good friend, a Wing Commander, who drops in when he's in town and talks of the men under him, with wisdom and affection. They live strung up to the highest pitch, are fed like fighting-cocks, and carefully watched, to avoid, as far as possible, any outside complication that might prey on their nerves. Sex is a difficulty, to a man in the pink of health. My friend said to me, 'They *must* relax between operations, and find amusements, so if I go down a dark lane and see one of them making love to what he calls "a piece of nice" I look the other way!'" Michael chuckled. "No doubt, Peter was out for a lark at first, seeing that lovely child in the hammock, then it became the real thing. It sounds genuine to me. If he's spared he'll come back and marry her."

"But I can't leave it like that," Janet urged.

At his second egg, Michael looked up and frowned.

"You're never going to force the girl to give him away, and land him in disgrace? Have you thought of the cost? In a crucial moment it might send him to his death! Marigold knows this and has the courage to shield him. I think she's splendid. Once fighting in the air starts in earnest we shall need every airman we've got, up against

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

the *Luftwaffe*. Its strength is appalling, eight to one, at a guess, though we're turning out planes as fast as we can. The French are weak, and I don't care for what I've heard of their army, so unless it stands firm we're in for a bad time. That's why I want you to remain here. As regards those young people, my advice is to let them alone."

"Anna Severn says the same, but I feel my responsibility. There's the baby, Michael."

"What's a baby, more or less, in a war that may involve the whole of Europe? Take a broad view, darling. At the worst a subsequent marriage would legitimise the child, and the man may get leave before its birth. When is it expected?"

"Early in April."

"Then that's all right. Plenty of time. Your duty is to look after Marigold's health, and protect her from your wild women. No small task, I should say! Are they foaming at the mouth?"

"Most of them. But Mrs. Gee turned up trumps and invited Marigold to the farm." Janet took Michael's cup, absently passed across, and refilled it. "Anna is on her side, with the Frenchwoman, Madame Ducroy. A large-hearted lady, who I fancy deceived poor Sybil and has no rooted objection to men!"

"More power to her! I wish you'd eat something?"

"Too early! I'd just finished some sandwiches when you came. Try some of this stodgy cake?" She saw him shake his head, and laughed. "It's so lovely having you here! And you're just the same! Success hasn't spoilt you."

"It's making me very poor, with the sur-tax! The theatre's booming. Still, I'll get a rebate with a wife! Now what's worrying you?"

"I was thinking you ought to marry someone younger, who could give you children."

"Heaven forbid! A baby squawling under my window when I'm trying to write? They always seem to park them out nowadays, and then desert them! But we're getting away from the subject. Are you going to continue hounding down the visiting angel?"

"I don't know. I must think it over."

Michael did not press the point, knowing Janet was half-convinced. Instead, he asked:

"How do they correspond?"

"They don't, so far as I know. All letters pass through my hands."

"They must, or that girl would be desperate! What papers do you take in?" He listened to Janet's explanation. "Well, there you are! The Personal Column in *The Times*. It's easy to see you've never indulged in an illicit adventure!"

"Only with you," she reminded him. "But I'll say this, you tried to make me an honest woman! That's what I thought that day at the Zoo."

"You didn't?" He wiped his mouth, rose and kissed her. "Nice scent? It can't be what I gave you two years ago?"

"It is. Marigold insisted on it! I daren't use it at the Castle."

But his thoughts were wandering.

"Do you only go to Muss once a week? Couldn't you make an exception and lunch with me there to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid not." Janet was sorely tempted. "I might find a shopping excuse on Saturday, but I must be home for midday dinner."

"Then I'll be at the harbour to meet you. What time?"

"At ten, about. Not at the harbour, as Charlie will see you, and I'm having trouble with her. She won't speak to Marigold, although she was the girl's greatest friend. We could meet and have coffee in the shop next to the post office." Janet awoke to the length of his visit. "Can you spare the time, Michael? So deadly for you at Muss!"

"I'll amuse myself. But I want to tell you something. Let's go back to the arm-chair?"

They settled down in their old position, Janet's eyes on the clock. He must go soon, for the short day was nearing its close, with fading colour in the west, and the hush that waits on sunset.

"How peaceful it is," he murmured. "I wish I could stay here."

"Instead of leaving me to face my critics?" She was suddenly nervous. "Whatever shall I say to them, Michael? To explain our 'important business'?"

"It's perfectly simple. I brought you a fresh contract to sign." His eyes twinkled. "With your royalties

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

reduced during the war. A lot of publishers are doing this. We argued the point, as I didn't approve." He smiled into her eyes. "At some length!"

"Brilliant! I wish I had your imagination." She would remember the peaty smell of tweed to the end of her life, she thought, her head resting against him. "What are we going to do, Michael? I can't desert my post."

"Not yet, for several reasons. This is one. I've been asked to go to America for a lecture tour, British Propaganda. I'm too old to serve as I did in the last war, but this is something I could do, fight the Isolationists. I've a big public there for my novels, and I've hopes of a play. Not this one, too British for their taste"—his lips curled—"or as they say, too 'localised.' No Main Street or Civil War in it! The agent tells me I should have a big reception—a thing I loathe! And I tremble when I think of the Women's Clubs. But if it's any help to show what we're doing to save civilisation, for that's what it comes to, it may be worth trying, as a counterweight to their Press. The tour to start in the New Year. That would tide over Marigold's baby; I should probably be away for some months. Then, as you say you don't think Mrs. Mappin will be here for long, we could get married. There's nothing in her will to forbid this, as Marigold's guardian?"

"No. It wouldn't have occurred to her." Janet's heart was beating fast. "But we couldn't live here?"

"I don't see why not. I could come backwards and forwards, between my work." Michael looked at her slyly. "Think what the air would do for me! But first, what about the American tour? Shall I go, or take a bungalow at Muss?"

"Go, of course!" It cost her an effort, but she smiled. "You'd always regret it if you didn't."

"Well, I don't want to become entirely a Colonel Blimp in a Club window recalling past glories. I hate leaving you, but I think you're pretty safe here, although there's been trouble in the Orkneys and the Firth of Forth. Have you anywhere to shelter if the Huns came over?"

"Yes, the dungeons, as we call our cellars, cut in the rock."

"That's a relief to my mind. As regards the community, it's what they want, fresh air let in on their stuffy



feminism! If they don't like it they can depart. You'll be mistress here and I'll back you up." Michael drew her closer. "How's that, my sweet?"

"I'm not certain." Janet looked troubled. "But we needn't decide yet. By the time you return Marigold may be married, and that would help. I should like to keep the community together for Sybil's sake, though it's possible some may be called up, not for the Services, but war work. Amy, for instance, to teach evacuees, and Clara as a nurse. They may even want to go. Charlie has hinted at this. Can you drive a launch, Michael?"

"At a pinch, but we'd easily find an old sailor, glad of the job." He looked at his wrist-watch. "We'll have another talk later on, as I must be off. I hope my boatman has waited. If not, you'll have to put me up!"

"I expect Mrs. Brown's been looking after him, glad to hear the village gossip," Rising, Janet gazed up into Michael's face. "I hate your going! You've been such a help. Still, there's Saturday. Unless Sybil is worse, or the weather too bad for the launch. You'd understand that?"

"Yes, don't take any risks." Releasing her from his lingering embrace, he said in a lover's voice, "If you don't come I shall stay on and look out for you each morning. It only means a few telegrams." His smile broadened. "I need a holiday in a cheerful spot!"

Janet took Marigold's advice; they passed through the suite and down the stairs without meeting anyone, the kitchen full, and a watch kept on the cliff path. As the hours wore on, and darkness fell, the talk increased. She was met with black looks when she put her head in finally to say good night on her way to relieve Clara. Ruth, unable to contain her curiosity, burst out:

"Where's the man?"

"At Muss, by now, I suppose, if you mean Mr. Chaytor." Janet's voice was calm. "Why?"

"We didn't see him return!"

"He left long ago. I took him across to have a look at the swimming pool and in by Marigold's door. Then I had a good sleep, glad there were no interruptions. I feel all the better for it."

And indeed, she looked it, clear-eyed, and smiling as she caught Anna's amused glance. The Deaconess said coldly:

## FORBIDDEN TO MAN

"Was there any necessity for Mr. Chaytor to come here, breaking the rules?"

"It was certainly a surprise, but I couldn't very well ask him to go, and he was a great help, concerning a new contract with my publishers. Is that all?" Janet asked sweetly. "I kept him well away from the Castle. Now I must go to Mrs. Mappin, so good night."

Her conscience was clear, for they had discussed the terms walking back in the twilight, and she had slept for two hours, her last thought their next meeting. Fortunately, next day she found that the flour would soon be running out and decided to get a new sack whilst the sea remained calm, Mrs. Brown approving this. The fine spell lasted, and Sybil's condition was unchanged. So Janet left her on Saturday, with the Deaconess in charge, unaware of Clara's acid comment: "Always talking of her work among the poor, so what about a sick relation? That generally comes first."

When the launch reached the harbour Charlie looked round suspiciously, but there was no sign of Janet's friend. He was waiting in the market-place outside the pastry-cook's, and came forward to meet her.

"I've a car," was his greeting. "So we'll get out of this. A drive will do you good."

"What a treat! But we mustn't go far," Janet warned him, with a rising excitement, thinking how nice he looked.

"I'll watch the time, so come along." He led her up a lane by the *Red Lion*. "Isn't it a gorgeous day? I woke early and thought of you."

Here was the hotel garage, and the old Daimler that once had belonged to Sybil, sold to the landlord, since she had no further use for it.

"In front," he told Janet. "I'm driving." And turned to the man in charge. "You put that parcel in?"

"Yes, sir, at the back. Thank you, sir."

He pocketed the tip and watched them off with a pawky amusement. One of the "nuns" from Rual, in for shopping regular, but to-day she'd other ideas in her bonnie heid. A pleasant gentleman.

"I scoured the country yesterday," Michael was telling Janet as he turned the car uphill. "Came across a lovely view of distant mountains, which I want you to see. Are you comfortable there?"

## THE ISLAND

"Quite, in my old seat. This was Sybil's car, in which we came to Scotland."

"No? It's worn well. It was weak of me to let you go, but I saw you needed a holiday, and regretted it later, though I never imagined you'd stay so long."

"Nor did I," Janet confessed. "I thought Sybil would tire of the island, and that the community mightn't last. There is only one excuse for conventual life and that's religion. We had nothing to hold us together, except a grudge against man that in some cases amounted to hatred. This is a marvellous escape!"

She drew a deep breath of the clear air warmed by the sun, and smiled at Michael.

"I can't think how you've stood it. Especially, when Mrs. Mappin's health gave way. Disastrously, I gather?"

"Yes. I've been afraid, Michael. I don't mind telling you now. Even the Deaconess urged me to call in an alienist, but Sybil would never have agreed. The one who suffered most from her moods was Marigold, poor child. Miss Plowden was a great help, such a sensible woman, Mrs. Gee another, although she has never forgiven Sybil for having Polly beaten."

"Who did it?" Michael asked, shocked when he heard the full story. "Didn't the others rebel?"

"Only a few. They showed the worst features of repression, a sadistic pleasure in punishing a girl who had known love. Don't let's talk about it. This is so perfect!"

"Wait till you see my surprise! But we're coming to a pretty part, a glen with a trout stream. When I'm the laird of Rual we'll fish here. There's the old bridge." He pointed. "I think we'll stop and admire it." Suiting the action to the words, he looked behind them, then at the empty downward slope. "No one about!" Releasing her, flushed and breathless, he smiled. "Better than the bun shop, eh?"

"Much!" Janet straightened her hat, and went rigid. "Take care! Here's a car."

It wheeled round a farmhouse ahead of them and approached rapidly. The driver gave the pair a keen glance, and waved a hand as he passed.

"That was Dr. McGregor!" Janet gasped. "You don't think he saw us, Michael?"

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"Earlier? He couldn't, darling. Is he Mrs. Mappin's medical man?"

"Yes, and Marigold's. I like him, and feel she is safe in his hands."

"That's good. But we won't give him any more doubts as to your behaviour!" Michael restarted the car. "You've a fine colour now," he teased her, unaware that Dr. McGregor had noticed this, and chuckled.

They crossed the stone bridge and mounted another long ascent, the scenery becoming wilder, with outcrops of rock between dried heather and bracken, still holding its russet flame. Near the summit Michael's face grew eager, and presently, a cry broke from his lips:

"It's clear! Now, lift your eyes to the everlasting hills."

They had halted, with a grind of the brakes. Far away, a range of mountains rose, their crests capped with white. Janet could not believe the vision.

"Snow! In this mild weather?"

"It isn't mild up there. It will last until the spring is warm enough to melt it, and send the streams rushing down. Isn't it lovely against that pale blue sky?" He saw her silently nod. "They look quite near, but the distance is deceptive. I know, as I tried to reach them and had to turn back at the end. It was getting dark. You're not cold, darling?"

"No! I love the wind in my face. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Still, I think when you've had enough we'll find a more sheltered spot." He tipped his wrist. "Yes, time for drinks. Past eleven."

Janet smiled at this.

"I suppose you've found a convenient pub in the wilderness?"

"We'll do better than that. You wait!"

They went on, down the stony descent, Michael driving carefully, until they reached another glen and a wood where birch predominated, still bearing its sparse yellow leaves.

"This will do! I think we'll sit at the back. More private?"

Intrigued, Janet followed his lead and watched him unearth a bottle in a straw case, and two tumblers, tucked behind the cushion.

"Oh Michael, how naughty! Champagne!"

"Well, you wouldn't lunch with me, and it's the best drink at this hour." He unwrapped the tumblers. "Hold these." And drew the wire off the bottle. "Now! A good, tight cork." He wrestled with it, and there came a pop, then the wine foaming out. "Drink up, my lovely! To our future life together! Quite good," he said after tasting it. "You'd have to pay double the price for this in London. Long live Scotland!"

Leaning back on the worn seat they smiled at each other, and their secret thoughts.

"I haven't been so spoilt since I dined with you in town," Janet told him. "I must say I love champagne!" She began to laugh. "If only the Deaconess could see us! She rebuked me for breaking the rules. It was such fun, Michael, they were still waiting to see you go at supper-time! So I put my head in and wished them good night!"

He laughed, then his face went grave.

"And what about yours? I could have kicked myself in the boat when I remembered you were sitting up with Mrs. Mappin and I'd done you out of your sleep. Why didn't you remind me?"

"Because I wanted every minute of your company. After you left I had the best sleep for months, so don't look like that. Do you think I ought to?" He was filling up her glass again. "Oh, stop!"

"It can't hurt you. You've a good head, in more ways than one. Talk better, not worse, when you've drink taken."

"That puts me on my mettle. But I've grown so dull!" A memory rose. "Just as well, perhaps, as Anna declares that men don't like clever women. Is that true?"

"It depends," he said thoughtfully. "If they're none too bright themselves it puts them at a disadvantage. It's certainly the case with a certain type that rams her opinions down your throat. But, personally, to feel a spark in one's brain quickened by the woman you love is an exciting experience. Even in your letters I've known this, and gone back to my work inspired. I suppose, with the young, love is largely due to physical attraction, which overrides mental sympathy, but at my age companionship counts. I can't abide a stupid woman! I want a brain

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to match my own." He smiled suddenly. "Perhaps, that isn't a compliment?"

Janet laughed, hugging her happiness.

"That's so like you! I'd give a year of my life to write as you do."

"You'll improve when you know what love means. It's always been a mystery to me how a virgin"—his eyes twinkled—"presumably, writes about passion. I suppose they mug it up? Not that you fail in this, as a rule, but sometimes, I fancy, you hedge."

"Wouldn't you, living on this island? No 'copy,' until——" She broke off. "That reminds me! I'm going to take your advice about Peter, immoral, as the Deaconess would call it, and let them alone at present."

"You're wise. That girl deserves the reward of her courage. Oh, I've brought her some chocolates, the best I could find at Muss. Now, where is that box?" He hunted for it and passed it over. "With Uncle Michael's love, tell her."

"She'll say again, 'Isn't he a dear?' Janet leaned forward. "That clock's stopped. Oughtn't we to be turning back?"

"Soon, I'm afraid. But tell me first, are you certain about America?"

"Quite. You'd do it well, and we should be parted, anyhow."

"I might run up again before I go, meet you on a Wednesday. I won't come to the island." He saw Janet hesitate, though sorely tempted, and added, "We'll leave it open at present, but write to me, as often as you can." Michael frowned. "That horrible custom of going with the mail once a week!" He took the empty glass from her. "Let's pack up, and then we'll say good-bye here. Better than on the top of a mountain?"

Presently, they were driving homewards, to the familiar rattle of the old car, in a happy silence, except when some feature of the landscape brought a swift, "Look!" A herd of Highland cattle, or an old shepherd, plaid wrapped about him, and a collie at his heels, too proud to give them a glance that might suggest curiosity. Then a sailor on leave, with a young girl whom he drew back against the loosely piled wall, to scowl at them as they swept past.

## THE ISLAND

"Where shall I put you down?" Michael asked Janet. "If I mayn't take you to the harbour?"

"In that lane by the garage. I've to call at the post office." She listened to his next suggestion. "I couldn't wear it, darling, so don't waste your money."

It was strange, she thought, that at forty-nine a man should be anxious to give her an engagement ring. Strange, but sweet.

"Then isn't there anything else you want?"

Janet thought for a moment, and her face lit up.

"Yes, a pram! I daren't get one here for Marigold. It would be all over the town!"

"Good Heavens!" Michael's face was blank. "You're not suggesting I should buy it?"

"No, but haven't you a friend who would choose one? Some woman with a nursery? You could say it was for a niece cut off from civilisation. It must come in a crate, so that nobody can guess. It would be such a help, as I can't think who to turn to."

"Wouldn't a catalogue do? I might risk my reputation as far as that."

"Of course it would. How stupid of me! There'll be a cot wanted as well. It's early days, but in the last war they all sold out. You'd be a lamb to see to it!"

"I feel more like a wolf in a trap." He caught her anxious glance and chuckled. "It's rather funny, you know, a pram instead of a ring? Still, quite modern! Peter is getting out of all this very nicely. Lucky chap, in every way." His left hand felt for her knee and pressed it. "Will you like being married to me, Janet?"

"How can I tell?" she asked, with a mischievous glance. "'Presumably,'" she quoted, and heard him chuckle. "If I'm vague it's the champagne. One thing I can promise you is that I won't interrupt your writing. I've had too much of that myself! But when you're free I don't think we'll ever be bored, or quarrel." Her smiling expression changed. "If all goes well. There's a good deal to happen first."

"I'll be patient. For six months from now, but no longer."

Janet was counting on her fingers.

"That will be May. I must get Marigold well, poor

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child, if she's still in my care. Peter, when he comes on leave, may want her to go to his relations. They're well off, I gather."

"I hope he will. Then I could come straight back to you from America." He slackened speed. "Here's the town."

It seemed appropriate that a cloud should veil the sun as Janet walked down the lane, and looked round at the corner. Michael was still there. She caught the wave of his hand, and stifled an impulse to run back, thinking how absurd it was in a woman of her age. There were three letters at the post office, a bulky one for Madame Ducroy. Was it really a brother, who wrote so often from France? Janet had her doubts. She reached the harbour out of breath.

"Has the flour come?" she asked Charlie, who was looking surly.

"Long ago. It's late."

"I know." Janet stepped on board with her single parcel and searched her brain for an excuse. In the end she improvised wildly. "I met Dr. McGregor going out to a country patient, and couldn't resist a short drive. It's so long since I was in a car, and what do you think we saw, Charlie? Mountains with snow on the top!"

But Charlie, casting off, was not interested.

"Might be. Why didn't he bring you down here? Save you a walk."

"Too busy." Janet noticed the other's mocking smile and guessed the truth. She had seen the doctor near the harbour. "I had to go to the post office. There's a letter for you. Here!"

Charlie merely glanced at the envelope.

"It will keep. Tide's low." After a minute she added, "I've been expecting it."

Left to regret her useless lie, Janet wondered if the electrician had found a war job.



## CHAPTER XIV

THE last of Michael's chocolates beside her, Marigold sat on the hay in the barn, re-reading her lover's letter, a constant joy when she could escape from the Gees. It began by telling her that he was in France with his squadron, and their hurried departure had cancelled all leave for the present. He hoped she had gathered this from his message. Solange had warned Marigold that the censorship might be a check on his ardour, but Piers had been clever in his allusions. Did she remember their picnic in the wood, and the rain beating against the tower windows? This had been easy to follow, their last night of love. Talk of rain, it did nothing else in his part of France. He had been "standing by" for a whole day and was "cheesed off" when he found her letter. A glorious surprise. He liked the illustrations at the end; puzzling until she remembered the row of crosses! She had a gift for that sort of thing, and he had been sorely tempted to run up for a fresh course of instruction before he left, but the distance had been too great for forty-eight hours, and there was the difficulty of meeting. He was glad now he had not risked it, on learning of her mother's illness. He hoped his Goldie was not grieving too much, and that if the worst happened she would realise its mercy. Marigold could understand his mixed feelings and abrupt change of subject.

This base was a "ropey" hole, and if the nearest village was typical of French country life Heaven help them! The depression abnormal, even in the *estaminet* they visited in the evenings. It was kept by a "woman with a bust—and a wonder it hasn't!" With two chalk-faced daughters, who smiled sweetly and did you over your change. Since all the English were rich! The latest local excitement had been the wedding of a leading *rentier*, only forty years or so older than the bride, who looked like a frozen statue of modesty. Which reminded him: he had not forgotten to ask his solicitors when he made his will about her friend and that queer marriage. A Scottish Act

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had been passed this year forbidding the ancient custom, but it didn't come into force until January 1st, so they were spliced good and proper. The only hope now was divorce!

How clever he had been, the girl thought, to lead up to this so casually. She turned the page, which was getting a trifle worn. What annoyed him about the natives was that they seemed to blame the British for letting them in for another war, and also, for not sending sufficient planes. As if we could spare them! Politics seemed to be the only thing they cared about, and the scandals resulting from political intrigues. They couldn't keep a stable Government.

He had heard from Tiny, posted to a decent spot near a town where pleasures were manifold, if not select! Did Goldie remember the burn? That lady was forgotten in a new romance. But Tiny was a "pathfinder", in other words lucky in these affairs. Robin was with him and they enquired tenderly after "Mrs. B.-M." Piers missed them, but there were some good types here, to include an actor, who gave marvellous impersonations—was doing it now, confound him! Everybody "nattering" and the wireless on, full blast. Here two words were crossed out. Such a noise! "He's being really funny," Piers wrote. "Imitating Vera Lynn weeping over her deah boys at the Front! Somebody's given him a flag to blow his nose on! I wish you were here, you'd love it. All that was left of you!" He referred to the snap-shots and the spade guinea, always with him. He was afraid he would not get Christmas leave, too many after it, but he hoped for one early in the New Year. Meanwhile, he was looking forward to a "forty-eight" in Paris, and would send her a Christmas present. Should he do it in the usual way, and enclose a thankoffering for her friend?

Marigold laid the letter down on her knee and gazed across the dusky barn, facing the temptation. Since everyone now knew of "Peter" why shouldn't it be directed to her? In block letters, with nothing inside that could serve as a clue. She had not forgotten Charlie's scornful remark; it would show that her lover meant to return, and probably, surprise them all. A present from Paris? How exciting! She would have to keep it a secret if it were sent through Solange, lock it away unseen. But

how could she explain to Piers? Besides this, there was still the chance that her mother might recover, and then there would be an awful scene. Mustn't risk this, because of the baby, although she was feeling very fit, for the morning sickness had passed. So fit, in fact, that meeting Amy in the garden and seeing her ostentatiously step aside to avoid contamination, mischief had bubbled up.

"Don't be afraid," Marigold told her sweetly. "It isn't catching! Not at your age."

A sudden chuckle betrayed Irene, bent over the ground, earth-coloured herself, and Marigold had laughed, completing Amy's wrath.

"Bold as brass!" she threw at the girl. "It's disgusting we should have to mix with you! If your mother knew you'd be beaten!"

She had looked so menacing for a moment that Irene had raised her hoe.

"You shut up, or I'll give you a taste of this! Here's Dr. Janet."

Amy had swiftly departed.

"It was my fault," Marigold explained penitently. "But I couldn't help it!"

Janet scolded her. She mustn't provoke people; things were bad enough already, and the least she could do was to try and preserve her dignity. Crossing the lawn Janet decided that Michael would say, "What a futile appeal to youth!"

Marigold had guessed that she owed the cessation of questions regarding Piers to her new "uncle's" intervention, and had been tickled by Janet's slip in presenting the box of chocolates. So the pair had met again at Muss, the reason Janet was late in returning.

"Don't worry," she told the latter earnestly. "I'll say they came from you."

Mrs. Gee had disapproved of the gift. Be kind, but don't spoil the sinner. Getting a bit too perky, she thought, unaware of the cause, the lover's letter. The next morning the farmer heard the girl laughing riotously with Polly and bustled in to discover the cause. Smut had caught a mouse, and laid it down shamming dead for a second too long. No harm in that! Mrs. Gee had smiled herself, at the big cat's discomfiture, and renounced the idea of

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suggesting that Marigold should return to her lessons. Just as well, for a fortnight later Mrs. Mappin died.

Died as she had lived, the victim of her stubborn will.

Janet was roused at midnight by a violent peal of the bell in Mrs. Brown's room. Throwing on a dressing-gown she hurried to the suite. On Sybil's threshold, to her consternation, she saw Clara on her knees feeling the patient's pulse as she lay outstretched on the floor by the bed.

"She's gone," Nurse Parr announced, looking frightened. "I couldn't help it! It wasn't my fault. I never dreamed she'd do such a thing!"

"Steady!" Janet verified her opening statement. "Yes! Now take your time and tell me what happened." To herself she was saying: "Thank God, for her sake as well as Marigold's. My poor Sybil!" For already, she guessed part of the truth.

Nurse Parr rose, and pulled herself together.

"She'd been restless, doctor, and grunting, as she sometimes does, so I asked her if she wanted you. I couldn't be certain she understood, but she didn't seem satisfied. I tried to make her more comfortable, but she kept on turning her eyes to the bathroom door, so then I thought of Marigold. That seemed to be it, so I told her she was staying at the farm, but I'd send for her early in the morning, and now Mrs. Mappin must sleep. Her face went vacant again and she closed her eyes, so after a little I left her. The kettle was boiling over and I went across to lift it—I'd been making myself a cup of tea." Clara saw Janet frown and went on quickly, "She was perfectly quiet, had dropped off, I thought, and then I heard a sound and turned round. She'd got part of the bedclothes off, and a leg out! I couldn't believe my eyes, and before I could reach her she rolled over the edge. It was the shock, I suppose. Another stroke?"

"Undoubtedly." Janet saw it all. Sybil had not believed that Marigold was with the Gees. She had never stayed there before. "I wish you'd rung for me sooner."

"How could I tell?" Nurse Parr was on the defensive. "She's had these glimmers of sense before, but they've never lasted, and you don't get much rest."

"No. Thank you," Janet said absently, wondering how much Sybil had remembered, and looked down at the heavy

features, setting in death. She had gone, with the secret so carefully guarded. Janet roused herself, hearing a soft tap at the door. "That's Mrs. Brown. She'll help us to get her back."

"You're not blaming me, I hope?" Nurse Parr enquired stiffly.

"No. You've been very good. Come in!" Janet called, and added in an undertone, "We'll keep this to ourselves."

When she learned the facts Mrs. Brown agreed. So headstrong, poor lady! It sounded nicer to say "died in her sleep." It was what one expected of the gentry.

The only person told the bleak truth was Dr. McGregor when he came. He listened gravely, his eyes on Janet's weary face, and approved her wisdom. The Deaconess would have made trouble, he guessed from his first interview with that lady, and Marigold would have been greatly distressed. As it was, she had taken the news to heart, fighting against the inevitable feeling of escape and blaming herself for this. Now Piers could come when he liked. Mustn't think of that; must think of poor mother, although Mrs. Gee said soothingly that it was the best way to go when Polly brought the news, and was dressed down for blurting it out. This on her return from the milk round, which Janet had forgotten. Going up to the farm she had found Marigold in tears. They would soon pass, she thought, with a stab of pity for the dead woman whose love had turned to tyranny.

Although she did not think it needful she asked Dr. McGregor later on if he would like to see the girl, surprised when he said promptly:

"Yes! Let's go to the farm? She's better there at present." On the way he made a confession. "I've always wanted to look round this island, but the Fortescues didn't give me a chance. I wasn't called in until the Major's last illness." He paused by the swimming pool. "This is nice. Is that the barrier where the young man climbed over?"

"It is, with some dangerous sunken rocks outside. The hammock swung between these two trees"—Janet smiled faintly—"where he first saw Marigold in the moonlight."

"You'd make every excuse for them! I'm not sure I don't myself, conseedering the circumstances." They started to mount the farther slope, and his face became sly.

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"That electrician of yours is a hard nut. Inquisitive, too. She asked me where I took you for our drive that day when I saw you in a car with a friend." He had his reward in Janet's expression. "Dinna fash yersel'," he chuckled. "I guessed it was a necessary evasion and played up. The odd thing was I seemed to know your companion's face."

"It was Michael Chaytor, the playwright." Janet, her cheeks hot, explained what had occurred. "I oughtn't to have done it, but I was in a fix. Do forgive me?"

"There's no need, Dr. Janet. I must have seen his portrait in the papers. A very clever man, and I admire his work." He chuckled again. "So *you're* in disgrace now? Shall I be admitted at the farm?"

"Yes, and welcomed. Mrs. Gee isn't like that, and she's been so good to Marigold, a real mother to her." Janet bit her lip, remembering Sybil. "Here we are!" As she opened the gate she saw Mrs. Gee emerge from the dairy, and come across to greet them. "This is Dr. McGregor," she introduced him. "He wants to see Marigold. Where is she?"

"In the garden, trying to find a few flowers for the poor lady's room. Not that we go in for them much," she told the visitor. "Gardening takes time."

"The one thing a farmer can't spare," he suggested, gazing into her blue eyes. "You're like me, always busy. And what a nice place you have. Plenty of fowls and ducks, I see. Good war work, growing food. We shall need it all before we've done with Hitler. Ah, here's my patient, and yours, I hear, looking bonnie."

Marigold had come round the side of the house with a sheaf of Michaelmas daisies and red leaves. The wintry sun touched her bright hair, and her face was incredibly pure and youthful.

"Oh, it's you!" she cried. "I heard voices. Fancy coming up here!" Shifting the flowers to her other arm, she held out her hand. "Rather grubby, I'm afraid," she told him as he took the slim fingers into his own. "I've been digging up a trail of blackberry."

"I don't mind honest earth. Better than painted nails! There's nothing much wrong with you at a glance, young lady, but we'll have a wee talk."

"You'd be quieter indoors." Mrs. Gee led the way to

the kitchen, at which he looked approvingly, and shut them in, then returned to Janet. "So that's the doctor? Seems a sensible man. I hope he won't let her go to the funeral. When is it to be?"

"There hasn't been time to settle that yet, but the undertaker came in the launch. The Deaconess is going over to-morrow to see the minister, and fix the day. I certainly shall not allow Marigold to go; funerals are always trying. Besides that, her condition might cause gossip."

"That's true," said Mrs. Gee. "You can leave her along of us, unless Polly wants to go. It 'ud be a bit of a change for her. Would the doctor like a few eggs?"

"I'm sure he would, if you can spare them."

Indoors, the good man was saying:

"I've seen a cat, but no dog. Don't you keep any?"

"We couldn't, as mother didn't like them, though I'd love one myself!"

"Might be useful at night," the doctor suggested. Marigold looked at him, and giggled. "When is that man of yours coming?"

"Not yet. He's in France," the girl said impulsively. "But please don't give me away? I'm not supposed to hear from him!"

"I'll respect the confidence, if you'll tell me this. Does he know about the baby?"

"It's the last thing I'd tell him! Time enough when he gets his leave." Marigold saw her companion frown. "I wish I hadn't said anything about his letter! It might get someone else into trouble."

"So that's it. A nice poseetion you put me into. Still, I've learnt to keep a still tongue in my head. Don't leave it too late," he said gravely. "For the sake of the child, who might blame you. A son doesn't take it kindly when he finds he's been born out of wedlock. Remember that."

"I will," Marigold responded meekly, and smiled behind his broad back as he opened the kitchen door. Her expression changed on the threshold. "There's one thing I want to ask. Are you *sure* poor mother didn't suffer at the end?"

"No more than you did when you fainted."

"That's what I prayed for," she told him. "So you think my baby's a boy?"

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"No one can say, except the Almighty. Is it important?" he asked.

"Very!" Marigold laid a hand on his arm and they came to a standstill. "You've been so good I'll tell you something. He would be an heir!" The magic word that Piers had used.

"To what?" the doctor asked, intrigued. "Property, or a title?"

But she would say no more. A dimple showed in her cheek. They'd know what Piers was when his present arrived, for now he could send it direct to her.

Polly had joined the pair at the gate with a basket holding eggs.

"My daughter," Mrs. Gee said proudly. "And these are for you if you care for them, doctor. Polly makes the rush baskets."

"That's clever of you," he told Polly, dumbly staring at him. "Especially when you put eggs in them!"

Giggling, she remarked 'twas the hens as laid them. A touch of pity came into his shrewd eyes, and he turned to her mother.

"A most welcome gift. Thank you, Mrs. Gee. I'll bring the basket back next time I come."

"No need," she told him. "We've plenty. Is Marigold well?"

"She's fine. I wish I could send some more of my patients here."

"A good curtain, Janet thought, as they turned down the path.

"Now you deserve your tea," she suggested.

"I mustn't stay. I've a patient to see before my surgery work."

"Then a drop of whisky? That's quicker."

"Breaking my rule? Still, for once," he yielded.

"That's a nice woman at the farm. I'd let Marigold stay on until she wants to return. I was thinking, would you allow her to have a dog? It's a good companion, and I happen to know of a young one for whom a friend wants a home. A Cocker spaniel, house-trained, but people are getting chary of pets on account of their food. They're gentle creatures."

"I don't see anything against it," Janet said thought-



fully. "She could train it at the farm, something for her to do. Mrs. Mappin didn't like them, but now——"

"Exactly. I noticed the absence of one, and Marigold told me the reason, regretfully. She'd find him better company than Polly."

"Yes. And when she returns to the Castle he could sleep in her room. I've never liked her present one and I shall put Nurse Parr there, someone at hand. The only trouble about Mrs. Mappin's is——"

She paused uncertainly, and Dr. McGregor, smiling, enquired:

"Not afraid of ghosties, surely?"

"No, but I believe that sometimes an atmosphere lingers where people have been unhappy, as my poor friend was. A puppy, scampering about, and company at night, would make all the difference." Janet saw him nod. "Not yet. I shall have the walls freshly distempered and alter the furniture. Then it will be a nice, airy room for Marigold, and the baby when it comes. You agree?"

"I do. You're a practical woman. I regret we didn't have that drive! Joking apart, I should like to have met Michael Chaytor."

"Too late now, I'm afraid," Janet responded thankfully. "He's off to America." They had reached the glass doors that lit the hall, and she asked, "What does your friend want for the dog?"

"Nothing, except a good home. He can bring it down to the launch one Wednesday when you're shopping. You'd better warn your electrician and I'll see to the rest. She mayn't like it, a male!"

So this was how "Chump" came to the island when all the sad business was over, even the Deaconess satisfied with the respect paid to the dead. By a strange paradox, with the exception of Janet and Polly, only those who condemned Sybil's daughter went to the funeral. Anna made no pretence of mourning, and Madame Ducroy found an excuse in her Faith. Miss Plowden held back, the launch fully taxed, and presently, went up to the farm with her prayer-book. Would Marigold like to read the beautiful service? They did so together, in the comfortable old kitchen, her pupil shedding a few tears, although it seemed to her that her mother had been dead

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for months. The governess felt her heart soften when the girl at the end asked:

"Will mother know everything now?"

"I expect so, my dear." A punishment for misdeeds, was her thought, and it gave her a slight shock when Marigold said, with an air of relief:

"Then she'll understand."

Nevertheless, they parted better friends on Polly's return, flushed with the unusual excitement. It had rained pitilessly, but Muss had turned out in force, for a funeral, even without baked meats, was an occasion. Janet went straight to the cottage, where Anna had lit a bright fire and insisted on putting her friend to bed. Now at last she could rest.

The Deaconess reigned at the Castle for twenty-four hours, when the community awoke to the fact that Janet was the new ruler. Startled, it saw her place Marigold in her mother's chair at the head of the table, take the seat facing her and invite the Deaconess to sit on her right. When the latter expostulated Janet held to her point: the island belonged to the girl, and she had better get accustomed to her duties as hostess, although all power until she came of age was vested in her guardian. Very clear and concise, Anna thought, enjoying the scene. Marigold started by inviting Mrs. Gee to sit by her, and then Miss Plowden. Inwardly pleased by her pupil's behaviour, the governess exerted herself to keep up the conversation, whilst Mrs. Gee ate, in a comfortable silence. The girl went through the ordeal well, her golden head high, remembering she was a married woman, at moments enjoying the furtive glances cast at her.

Ten days later she had her reward. Janet returned from shopping and arrived at the farm, with Charlie in her wake, carrying a hamper. She bumped it down on the scullery floor and beat a retreat when Janet called for Marigold. Surprised, the girl untied the lid, to cry aloud as a black, woolly body swarmed over the edge and with a whimper of joy squirmed round her.

"You darling!" She lifted the puppy into her arms, and a pink tongue shot out to lick her cheek. "You sweet—you silly thing!"

"He's well-bred," said Mrs. Gee, in the background. "Look at the black roof to his mouth. What is his name?"

"He hasn't been christened yet," Janet told her. "Marigold must do it. He's hers."

"Oh, Aunt Janet, I can't believe it!" Marigold broke out. "A dog of my very own. Look at him now!"

"Put him down," Janet ordered. "You mustn't let him lick your face. You'll have to train him, Marigold."

"Wants a drink, I expect," said Polly, and filled a saucer from the tap.

The puppy, excited, started to lap, trod in the saucer and upset it.

"You chump!" Marigold laughed. "Why, that's it! We'll call him 'Chump.'" The name bestowed on Piers at the aerodrome. "Come on!"

Youth to youth, Janet was thinking, and blessed the kindly Scot who had realised the girl's need. Chump, fed and given a run, was shut up in the scullery, for Mrs. Gee mistrusted Smut. Those two would never make friends, she pronounced, though there was a chance for Tibby, of the opposite sex. She was hoping that now she could have a terrier to keep down the rats.

All through dinner Marigold talked about the puppy, Miss Plowden indulgent, and the Deaconess interested. Brought up against a background of horses and dogs, the country seemed strange without them. Marigold had expected the usual objection to anything new, and listened eagerly to advice concerning the puppy's food, and the iniquity of letting him sleep on her bed. Once the habit was formed she would never cure him, a nuisance when he was full-grown. A box filled with hay was what he required, a basket no good; he would bite it to pieces.

"Don't turn him into a lap dog," the Deaconess warned her. "Or he'll never respect himself. I must see him."

There was a pause, Mrs. Gee unresponsive.

"I'll bring him up this afternoon," Marigold promised.

"I don't like dogs." Ruth played her baby act. "You won't let him bite me, Rachel?"

"A puppy!" the Deaconess said scornfully. "Still, you'd better not tease him. Dogs have long memories."

How hard she was, Amy thought. That class prided itself on being sporting, which meant keeping the poor man off the land in order to breed pheasants; and fox-hunting, to the farmer's despair, breaking their fences and

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trampling down the corn! Think of the money they spent on horses, which could feed starving families.

"Do you approve of dog racing?" she asked her patroness.

"I do not. It's no true sport, merely an encouragement to gambling, by people who cannot afford it."

"But isn't that the syme with horse racing?" Amy persisted. "Look at the crowds that go to the Derby!"

"And have a good day in the open. Half of them don't bet, but enjoy a national holiday. It improves the breed, besides giving employment to a host of men in the stables. I don't approve of betting in any form," the Deaconess said severely. "But the Turf is less harmful to the general public than night after night at the dogs."

"Hear, hear!" Janet supported her, and glanced at Charlie, attentive. "You agree?"

"It doesn't affect me, I've no money to waste." Into her scornful eyes came a glint of triumph. "You have to earn before you can spend."

"So people should," Janet said quietly, in the hush that had fallen on the table. "And be paid according to their merits, men and women alike. I don't approve of the dole, hard on the workers and encouraging the idle." She could feel the tension in the air, and she smiled at Marigold. "This doesn't apply to Chump!"

"A good dog earns its feed," Mrs. Gee remarked. "There's no better guard."

Ruth tittered, her eyes bright with malice.

"But we don't need a guard on the island, surely?"

Marigold knew what she meant and hoped that Chump would show his sharp little teeth when he met the hunchback, as he had done to Smut, with a courage that enchanted his mistress. Darling Chump! She must tell Piers about him.

After dinner the Deaconess drew Janet aside.

"Can I have a few words with you? In the library, I suggest."

"Certainly." Janet opened the door, and closed it behind them, a hint to the others. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Not precisely, but I was puzzled by what you said to Charlotte. You're surely not thinking of paying her?"

"It was in my mind," Janet responded. "Mrs. Brown is

paid for her services and it doesn't seem fair that Charlie should work for nothing."

"But that would be entirely opposed to my cousin's wishes. This is a charitable institution."

Janet repressed a smile, watching the Deaconess fold her delicate hands in her lap with an air of settling the matter.

"A charity should not include an unpaid electrician, any more than an unpaid porter at an almshouse. The same applies to Irene, who never has a holiday. I do not approve. It breeds discontent, especially in war-time when women have a good chance of employment."

"But if you once begin where will you end? They all work, after a fashion."

"Only as they would in their own homes, with double the comfort. They are well-fed, housed and even clothed. Yet Rachel practically refused to cut out a skirt for Marigold, although we support her sister as well, a useless and mischievous creature. Her deformity doesn't warrant this." For the Deaconess was frowning. "There is Amy, too," Janet went on boldly. "We have no use for a schoolteacher; her housework is bad and she tries to get out of helping Mrs. Brown. I know you take an interest in her, and the reason, but this doesn't seem to affect her conduct. She is openly insulting to Marigold, on whose money she is living." Janet forestalled the Deaconess, her lips parted, "I'm not condoning Marigold's conduct, but as her guardian I must think of her health, and protect her from malicious attacks. I was so pleased to see you give a lead in being kind about the dog."

This was difficult to parry. The Deaconess stared out of the window.

"It has been a great scandal," she murmured. "You cannot expect the community to overlook it."

"I expect them to have some common sense, and possibly, charity. Mrs. Gee has shown her worth, but Marigold cannot remain there indefinitely. Her place is here. I am having Mrs. Mappin's room painted and prepared for her, with Clara to sleep in the tower. By the way, I will tell you in confidence that I have been paying Clara for her nursing. I couldn't expect her to sit up at night voluntarily. On the other hand, I didn't want to engage a nurse from Muss, who might talk on her return."

"It was certainly difficult," the Deaconess admitted.

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"So you have made a start in this new idea. Will the estate stand it?"

"So it seems. Sybil was heavily insured, which will pay the death duties, and has never lived up to her income, and Marigold's money has been accumulating, with only Miss Plowden's salary. As to her clothes"—Janet smiled—"what did they cost? She's in rags! I must see to some new ones when I'm a little less tired."

"Yes, you must be worn-out." The Deaconess braced her shoulders. "I should like to thank you, Dr. Janet, for all you have done for my poor cousin." She paused. "Am I right in believing that you wish me to speak to Amy? A difficult woman, so pushing! But she should not set herself up as a judge. Oh, there's the dog! I must go out and see him."

A strange character, Janet thought. Narrow in her views, anxious to assert her position and lay down the law, yet tripped up by tradition. She mistrusted the island's new ruler, but had thanked her with genuine courtesy, Sybil's friend, who had taken the place due to a near relation, according to the Deaconess. Still, she wanted to stay, Janet remembered, was frightened of attack from the air, and suddenly, saw herself as lacking in generosity. For there was Marigold, smiling down at her cousin, on her knees opening Chump's mouth to examine his teeth, turning back his ears, and finally setting him squarely on his feet to see how he stood. A dear child, who bore no malice. Janet watched her tenderly, then became aware of a little group peering, dismayed, round the door that cut off the kitchen garden. The Deaconess had let them down! Janet started, at Anna's gay voice behind her.

"Another man come to the island? And look at him, rolling on his back displaying his rude tummy! What have you been up to, closeted with the Deaconess? Confessing your sins?"

"Some of them! I'll tell you."

"An excellent idea," Anna said at the end. "Pay Charlie, or let her go. But who would you get in her place?"

"A man, if necessary. An old sailor, past service age. That was Michael's idea, at a pinch. By the way, if the weather holds would you care to go out in the launch

to-morrow and do some painting? Take sandwiches and enjoy yourself?"

"You bet I should! At nine o'clock? The light goes so soon."

"Ten would be better. Charlie has to pump up the water and clean the furnace. I hate the way she's going on, but she does a devil of a lot, so let's be just."

"As if you could be anything else," Anna remarked. "If it makes it any harder for you I won't go to-morrow."

"It will give me an excuse to talk to Charlie. Come out and see the puppy, and I'll slip away."

They met Miss Plowden in the hall and took her with them.

"Don't let Marigold overtire herself," Janet warned the governess. "She ought to go back and have a rest."

"I'll see to it," Miss Plowden promised, and quickened her step.

Janet found Charlie in the carpenter's shop mending a kitchen chair.

"Busy?" she asked.

"Only glueing the leg."

"Then I'll stay for a moment. I want to talk to you." She met the electrician's lowering glance. "Mainly about Irene."

Charlie's eyes opened wide.

"What's wrong with her?"

"Too much work and no pay. I'm going to alter that, but keep it to yourself. She never gets a holiday, and very little help."

"They're all too damn' lazy," Charlie growled, and unwillingly, pushed a stool forward. "Better sit down, Dr. Janet."

"Thanks, I will. The trouble is how to approach Irene. You came about the same time, didn't you? Eleven years ago."

"You're not asking me to speak to her? She'd push my face!"

"Better than mine." Janet saw Charlie's secret grin, as she propped the chair on the bench. "I'll have to find some excuse. But I've never liked the present arrangement. All very well for those who do a little cooking and housework, pretty badly, some of them, or cobble up a skirt like Rachel. Mrs. Mappin had her own ideas, quite

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right as it was her money, but I'm in charge now and can do as I like, with Marigold's consent. Irene isn't the only one; you work too hard yourself."

"I've never grumbled, have I? Besides, I could go if I liked."

"And probably find a job that would suit you better. It would leave me in rather a fix. Few women have your experience, and I might be forced to engage a man. We can't be cut off from the mainland."

"A *man*?" Charlie scowled. "The others wouldn't stand for that!"

"They would when they couldn't get electricity or hot water, to say nothing of butcher's meat." Janet smiled. "They could go, of course, like you, and I shouldn't miss some of them!"

"Who said I was going?"

"You sounded like it. Just when I'd counted on your help with Irene. If I could say I was paying you wages she'd agree."

"Me?" Charlie turned it over in her mind. "Orlright, I'll stand for it. Anything to oblige!"

"That's no good unless you take them." Janet had seen through the manoeuvre. "You, Mrs. Gee and Irene keep this place going. Mrs. Brown, as you know, is paid, and so is Miss Plowden, so what's the trouble?" Her face became mischievous. "The Deaconess calls it a 'charitable institution', and it is in cases like Ruth, but there are exceptions."

"Sure. I've often thought it hard on Ma to make nothing out of the farm. Still, there's Polly, and who wants her? As to me, I'd like the money. Unless——" Charlie searched Janet's face. "It's not a bribe to make friends with Marigold?"

"Certainly not. Friendship can't be bought, and if it isn't deep enough to ride over trouble it's not worth much." She saw Charlie flinch. "That's your affair, so long as you don't do anything that's bad for Marigold's health".

"I never speak to her," Charlie muttered.

"A good thing," said Janet dryly. "Just as well if Amy copied you. Now, as to terms. Three pounds a week and everything found, to start from, to-day. That suit you?"



"Okay," Charlie said awkwardly, gulped, and brought out, "Thanks!"

"Then, before I forget, I want you to take Anna on the launch to-morrow to some spot she'll choose where she can paint. She is trying to sell her pictures and raise a little money in order to return to the Bar. I want to help her, although I shall hate the parting."

"She's a good sort," Charlie agreed, and added curiously, "So that rule's gone too?"

"Any rule that denies people freedom, so long as it doesn't injure others. That's what we're fighting for, isn't it? Against Hitler and slavery." Janet rose, with a smile. "I'm glad you're so sensible, Charlie. One point remains: shall we tell the others? I'm not afraid of Irene talking, and it might make people jealous. There'd be Amy saying she was ill-treated! Though why she should be paid I can't imagine. Perhaps, for learning the catechism?"

Charlie chuckled.

"Good for you, Dr. Janet! I won't peach."

The latter went out, satisfied, a letter to Michael in her mind. She had no scruples in doing what she thought was right, for Sybil's will bound her to nothing, and she knew in her heart that the latter had not been perfectly sane for some years. She had already talked to Marigold, who approved of Janet's scheme. All those rules of poor mother's, which had made people unhappy! Why shouldn't Anna be free to paint? And there was Polly, discontented. Couldn't she go to Muss one Wednesday and look at the shops? If her mother approved, Janet agreed, aware of a touch of wistfulness in Marigold's eyes.

The girl was prepared for the general surprise next day when Anna and Charlie were missing at dinner. Janet explained the reason calmly.

"Dear me," came from the Deaconess. "I really can't get accustomed to these breaches of the rules. It doesn't seem the same island, so quiet and—er—restrained."

"I think you can trust Anna to keep up our reputation," Janet said, to Miss Plowden's amusement. "As to Charlie, it's no change for her."

In this she was mistaken. The pair returned in the dusk for tea, the electrician still glowing from a long tramp, the first for years. At Anna's suggestion the tobacconist's

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son had been whipped in to keep an eye on the launch, and avoiding the centre of the town they had explored the country until Anna found what she wanted. Armed with her share of sandwiches, Charlie had set forth in search of adventure, fording a shallow stream to climb the hills and finally lie in a sheltered wood, one with the wild life about her. Startled, she had found herself wishing that Marigold were there, then trampled her weakness underfoot. That was over; only disillusion remained. The sombre mood had not lasted in the keen air when she retraced her steps, to find Anna ready to go. They did not reveal on their return to the Castle that they had stopped at a lonely inn for a glass of beer, the final joy, with the dour face of the landlord, who disapproved of Charlie's slacks, and was thankful that his bar was empty. He saw the hand of God in her disfigurement. Artists they "wass," he told his wife contemptuously.

The next day Charlie turned painter, rigged up planks on the step-ladders and distempered the walls above the panelling in Mrs. Mappin's room. Meanwhile, Solange revealed another talent, cutting out and fitting covers on the furniture. The sound of the sewing-machine was heard in the land, everyone driven to work, and presently, to cleaning the room. Sybil had bought the pretty chintz two years ago, and then taken a dislike to it, preferring the old faded brocade that harmonised with her appearance and the loss of youth, so bitterly resented. Janet cleared away her belongings ruthlessly, thinking of Marigold, gave what clothes they desired to the community and sent the rest to the minister at the village to distribute among the poor. All that remained was an old winter coat, which to Janet's surprise Marigold claimed, of dark blue cloth, rather out of shape. She was not allowed to see the room until it was ready for her, with her own bed installed, and the tallboy, replaced by a chest of drawers in the tower. Janet's installation gift was a low oak chest, the lid removed, filled with fresh hay for Chump.

Mrs. Gee was sorry to lose her guest, yet felt the satisfaction of every hostess after a long visit in having the house to herself. The girl's delight when she entered the new room with the sunny light reflected from its yellow walls was Janet's reward. For the first time beauty had entered Marigold's life. She gazed at the chintz curtains

with their long spires of delphinium, and then at the blue quilt.

"I've never seen anything so heavenly! However did you match it?"

"I sent to Story's in Kensington, where the chintz was bought some time ago and never used. They've such lovely things. You must thank Solange for her upholstery work, though everyone had to sew." Janet's smile grew mischievous. "Amy has sore fingers!"

"Hooray! Could I ask Solange in after supper? And wouldn't you and Anna come? We might have some coffee, as a treat?"

"Ask whoever you like, but make it clear from the first that they can't come without an invitation. It's your private suite, and you'll be glad of it when your baby arrives."

"Yes. Won't he love it! Blue for a boy?" Marigold threw her arms round Janet. "I do think it's sweet of you. Even a bed for Chump! Where is he?"

Suspiciously nosing round the bathroom, unhappy as only a small dog can be in unfamiliar surroundings. He refused to settle down, and Marigold went off at last to consult the Deaconess.

"He doesn't like his new bed! Whatever shall I do?"

"I'll come." Cousin Selina followed the girl. "You must find something old belonging to you. That will help him to feel at home." An ancient jumper was laid on the hay, with a warning: "He'll probably tear it to bits."

"He's eaten both my bed-slippers," Marigold confessed. "Oh, don't!"

"You should always lift him by the scruff," the Deaconess said firmly. "Now—good dog! Lie down."

Chump, protesting, detected a familiar scent, that of his dear mistress, buried his nose in the ancient wool, scrabbled, turned round twice and was still. With the suddenness of puppyhood, he fell asleep, under Marigold's adoring eyes.

"You are wonderful, Cousin Selina," she whispered. "He'll do now, so I'll go to tea." A new thought struck her. "Would you care to come in for coffee after supper? I'm asking Solange and Anna, and of course Aunt Janet."

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"A house-warming?" It occurred to the Deaconess that in all these years Sybil had never suggested it. "For a little, then. I'm going to bed early and you should do the same. I wonder if it's safe to leave Chump here. We'd better open the French window in case he wants to go out. You must be careful of the carpet."

"He's very good, generally," Marigold pleaded, with a last fond look at the spaniel.

The cousins arrived in the kitchen together, and Amy showed her jealousy, with a sniff.

"How do you like your new room?" Mrs. Brown greeted the girl. "Nice and bright, isn't it?"

"It's a dream! I want to thank everyone who took so much trouble over it." Her eyes avoiding Charlie, Marigold smiled at Solange, who said it had been a pleasure. Miss Plowden passed her pupil the sugar. "I must have a lump for Chump. That's poetry!"

"No," the Deaconess interposed. "You'll spoil his teeth. Take him a bit of cake, if you must, but I don't like scraps for dog between meals."

As if in protest there came a shrill bark from outside, and Marigold rushed to the window, and peered behind the black-out.

"He's there! Come across by himself! Isn't he clever? I must let him in."

They heard her open the back door and call, "This way, Chump!" A black streak shot into the kitchen, bringing Tibby on the hearth to her feet, arching her back and swearing. Undaunted, Chump advanced, but Charlie scooped up the cat whilst Marigold seized her pet. For a brief span they faced each other over the wriggling animals. Charlie muttered something about "scratch his eyes," but Marigold turned away. She could not forgive the electrician in that easy fashion.

"Take Tibby to my room," Mrs. Brown ordered. "It's hard on her in her own kitchen. Still, it's a nice little dog," she conceded.

Chump became the centre of attraction. Charlie did not return, as Janet noticed and regretted, guessing that the breach had widened. Marigold was thinking: "Serve her right! Speaking like that of Piers."

Nevertheless, she was not sorry to return home, and resume her lessons, history especially, where she took an

interest in the Saxon period that puzzled the governess, even dates committed to memory.

The next excitement was a box addressed to herself, brought back by Janet from Muss. Marigold flew with it to her room, but presently, returned with a high colour and shining eyes, a blue leather case in her hands.

"Would you like to see a Christmas gift from my fiancé?" she asked Janet, who looked amazed. "In the refectory, I think."

Curiosity was too great for her enemies. They trooped in to see her place the case on a table, open the gilt clasps and raise the lid. Inside, against the padded *moiré* was a tortoiseshell hand-glass with a little gold G in the centre, flanked by a shoehorn and buttonhook. Below in the tray were brushes and combs, a powder-box and two smaller ones fitted into the corners, in the same finely marked and initialled shell. Janet looked swiftly at Anna, who raised her eyebrows, and then broke the silence.

"What a beautiful set!" A murmur of voices rose behind her. "A present worth having?"

Ruth pushed herself forward and for the first time addressed the owner directly.

"Why the G? It should be M."

"No," the girl said coldly. "It stands for what my fiancé calls me." She lifted the tray. "These are from Paris."

The shallow space was filled with ribbons! To Janet it seemed the final proof of the lover's sincerity.

"It is superb," Solange cried. "'E 'ave ze good taste. Look at——" The rest of her speech was drowned by an assault on the gong, Charlie, who had watched from the doorway relieving her feelings.

Proudly, Marigold closed the case and bore it off. As she passed the electrician she patted the leather top.

"From my *fisherman*!" she flung at Charlie, and regretted the words before she reached the suite, for Charlie was poor, and had sometimes renounced her tobacco to buy the girl a ribbon. Luckily, she did not catch the latter's retort, a minute too late: Peter certainly paid!

At dinner she remembered that Mrs. Gee and Polly had not arrived in time to see the gift, and felt a doubt. Miss Plowden made no allusion to it, but at the other end of the table the Deaconess murmured to Janet:

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"He must be well off. A pity she did it. There will be talk again."

There certainly was, mixed with secret envy. This was not shared by Solange, delighted with the set of fine, embroidered handkerchiefs, which Piers had enclosed for her.

Christmas was drawing near, and presently arrived, with its heavy dinner and subsequent drowsiness. Marigold, urged by Miss Plowden, had attended Cousin Selina's service and sermon, which with a typical lack of humour dwelt on Peace and Goodwill to *Men*! This amused the girl, who confided in Miss Plowden that she didn't think she would care for church; all that getting up and sitting down, bits of the Bible and singing, with no time for private prayer.

"You would," Miss Plowden insisted. "If you heard the service in a cathedral, with the boys' clear voices and the beautiful surroundings."

"Perhaps," Marigold said dubiously. "But when Jesus wanted to pray he went up a mountain alone."

Soon, soon, Piers would be coming. There were moments when she wished she could be the same as the girl found in the hammock, so young, and light on her feet. But she carried the "heir," she thought with pride, convinced that it was a boy, and a baby made up for everything. Anna photographed her with Chump, and Marigold cut out the two heads, close together, and sent them to Piers. On the back she wrote in pencil, "I'm a pathfinder too! Here's my latest!"

The days wore on, with no definite date from her lover. Then Charlie returned one morning from Muss to say she had heard in the tobacconist's that all leave at the Front was stopped; this from a man who had been expecting his son's return. The "phoney war" as America called it, seemed to be stirring to life. There had been extended fighting in the air over the North Sea, with enemy machines invading the Thames Estuary. More suggestive still, an emergency Cabinet meeting at the Hague, both Holland and Belgium alarmed by rumours. To confirm Charlie's report, the B.B.C. announced that "for the time being" leave for the R.A.F. in France had been cancelled. Marigold clung to the saving clause. She had begun to make the baby-clothes with Solange's help, and her courage

was infectious. Chump, too, was a comfort, for he liked the fire and would lie with his head near Marigold's feet as she sewed, and follow her everywhere. He had taken a dislike to the hunchback, who had once kicked him and then bolted into the library. He would show his teeth and growl when she approached, and Rachel complained to Dr. Janet, who agreed with the Deaconess that there must have been provocation, as he never did it to anyone else. Marigold was thankful, for Ruth had a habit of shadowing her, and of appearing suddenly, to startle the girl. Now she was afraid of the dog. The letters from Piers, so eagerly watched for, kept Marigold from fretting. They were shorter, suggesting haste, and he seemed more mature. No wonder, she thought, when she read of German planes being brought down, and deeper sweeps into that country. She redoubled her prayers, and wrote as often as Solange permitted. Then one day Madame Ducroy passed over two letters with British stamps. Marigold's heart beat fast when she opened the first and saw it bore his home address. He was on his way, coming to her! Then the joy died out of her heart. His uncle was dangerously ill, and Piers had been granted compassionate leave. He was scribbling these lines on his knee, expecting the end at any moment. A dreadful business, double pneumonia! Impossible to leave the dear old man, as Goldie would understand, but to be half a night's journey from Muss and not see her added to his despair. With no censorship, Piers let himself go. He wanted her, to lay his head on her breast, his golden girl, his wife! Despite the cruel disappointment Marigold could feel the depth of his love. The tears trickled down her cheeks. Poor darling! Why couldn't she be by his side? For the first time she regretted the coming child. It would be impossible to arrive like this, even if Aunt Janet were let into the secret.

Gradually, she calmed down, and remembered the other letter, hidden under the scribbled pages. That might contain better news. It bore the same address, had been written five days later, she found. Sir George had survived the crisis, and with care would recover. He declared that Piers had given him the strength to fight, which was tosh, of course, although the nurse said that the will to live was half the battle. Piers would have to return to France in forty-eight hours, these vowed to Sir George,

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since the doctors had vetoed his plan to cut short his visit and make a dash to Scotland. It was maddening! Would Goldie write and say she understood? Though she couldn't be sicker than he was. His sister had backed the doctors up, hard like their mother, accustomed to her husband's absence at sea for long periods, and wrapped up in her two boys. Always planting them on Uncle George with an eye to the estate. Rather a knock for her to hear of his "secret engagement!" He had shown her the snapshot of Goldie and Chump II—dark, like his father? She had said that Goldie looked "very young," and he had replied, "All the better. I hope she'll have children, someone to carry on the name. Ha, ha!" After this burst of high spirits he had seized the chance to tell his love what he thought of her, and a queer dream he had had, of baling out, to find Marigold in a green field, her arms outstretched to him. He had awakened before he could kiss her—just his luck! The worst of it was this leave might postpone his next. Everything depended on the war. At present France was deep in snow, but when the thaw came the Germans would move. They were massed on the frontiers of Holland and Belgium. He wound up, "Write soon and say you understand, my *princesse lointaine*—alas!"

Marigold kissed the letters and put them under her pillow to read again before she slept. She was thankful that she had received them after dinner, for Janet had returned late and Solange had wisely retained them, with an instinct that two might mean trouble. She came in presently with her sewing, and listened to the girl's despair. This endless waiting! Would she ever see him again? Solange gently rebuked her. She was only one of thousands of women enduring the same strain, and she must be brave. Chump, looking mournful too, scrabbled at her knee, for he knew his dear mistress was in trouble. Marigold hugged him and kissed his soft ears.

"He always understands! And Piers can't help it."

"But no. It shows 'e 'ave ze good 'eart, not selfish, like most men. Pierre 'as not written zis week."

The red herring worked; Marigold's thoughts turned to her friend's anxiety. It might be the post, so uncertain now, and trains were late in the snow. At this point she lifted her head to listen.



"Planes!"

"Onlee our own." But Solange crossed to the nearest window and drew the curtains. "It is wise to cover ze glass." She smiled at the girl. "Ze Deaconess will fly to ze cellar! But zay are not near. Chomp would growl if zey were."

The noise increased, Marigold very still in her chair, then gradually died away.

"What did I tell you?" Solange laughed. "Zere is nodding 'ere to attract ze Boche. Not even ze women!"

## CHAPTER XV

IT was Janet who brought Marigold's son into the world, in the worst gale she remembered on the island. March had come in like a lamb, to go out with proverbial violence. A calm succeeded, with spring in the air and daffodil buds parting their pale leaves, but few birds had returned from migration, as Polly observed, and prophesied further bad weather. On the Tuesday when Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway she went up to Black Rock and looked at the oily water and the clouds gathering in the north. She was not surprised when the wind rose during the night, to Mrs. Gee's distress.

"Marigold's getting near her time," she told her daughter at breakfast. "I only hope Daisy won't put things off and the calf arrive just as Charlie goes for the doctor. It will be rough crossing to-day."

Anna went to Muss and was thankful to get back safely to the jetty soaked by spray. She brought the mail with two letters for Madame Ducroy, who smuggled one into Marigold's room, where she sat near the window watching the trees bend before the wind.

"An English stamp," Solange pointed out, and lingered as the girl tore the envelope open, to see swift dismay in her face.

"It isn't his writing!" She turned the letter over in haste. "It's from his uncle!"

With fear in her heart she read:

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"Arthur's,

"St. James's Street,

"S.W.I.

"MY DEAR MARIGOLD,

"Piers tells me I may call you this and sends you his love. He cannot write himself, owing to a broken arm. I heard he had been brought to a London hospital, so came up to my Club and have been with him this morning. There is nothing dangerous in his condition, but it may take time, a compound fracture, and two of his ribs are broken. I must tell you he did a very brave thing, came home on one engine after a fight with a Messerschmitt, and with a damaged undercarriage, which could not be used. His wireless operator baled out, but his navigator was wounded, so Piers decided to take the grave risk of a landing. He may get what he calls a 'gong' for this, that is, a medal. Won't you be proud of him? If it is possible you will have to come up and go to the Palace, but that would not be for a long time and I hope to see you before then.

"Piers adds an 'illustration,' with his left hand, somewhat mysterious, and would like news of you. So write to him, care of myself, to my Club (Sir G. Harrington Chomeley, Bt.). Or should you prefer it, to Rose Cottage. I will take your letters to him and save delay at the hospital. Piers says you are not to worry; also, that the spade guinea did its duty!

"I was not allowed to write to you before, so take this opportunity to say I look forward to welcoming my future niece. If she is anything like the snapshots Piers showed me he is a lucky man! I will keep you informed of his progress, but it is a case of being patient, and no news will mean that he is improving.

"With all good wishes, dear Marigold, believe me,

"Yours sincerely,

"G. HARRINGTON CHOMELEY."

A charming letter, but it had been a shock. To think of her darling in pain, and the terrible risk he had run! Dumbly, she handed the letter to Solange, and watched her read it.

"But 'e is safe! Better where he is zan in France, so

do not distress yourself, *chérie*. Ze broken arm will mend, and you must remember your baby."

"I know." Marigold shook off a touch of faintness. "I must write to him at once. If only this storm would pass the launch might go sooner to Muss."

An arm round her, Solange helped the girl to the desk, then went into the bathroom and returned with a dose of sal volatile.

"Drink zis. It will 'elp you."

But not undo the mischief. Before an hour had passed the news went round that Marigold's labour had begun. Solange felt it her duty to tell Janet the cause, expecting to get into trouble, but the other merely smiled.

"I guessed it was you long ago, though it's good of you to tell me. Poor child! This coming now. I'll see her letter is posted as soon as the launch can cross, but the gale is getting worse, though Charlie wanted to risk it."

The electrician persisted, until Janet took possession of the boathouse keys. It was no use arguing with Charlie, haggard and defiant, although Janet pointed out that if the launch foundered they would be cut off from all help. It was early yet, and the gale might blow itself out. She had a word with Anna, distressed on her friend's behalf.

"I don't care," Janet retorted. "I'm fully prepared. After all, a woman in a lonely village would go to a neighbour's aid. I shall have to tell Dr. McGregor, but I fancy he'll back me up."

"Any decent man would! Is there nothing I can do?"

"Tell people to be quiet. I must get back to Marigold."

The hours wore on, with the wind beating against the Castle walls. The refectory was full. When Ruth crept to the wireless set and let out a burst of music even Rachel was angry with her. No heart! And the Deaconess reprimanded Amy, who said that Marigold was "paying for her sins."

"If that happened to all of us you wouldn't escape. The price of malice and uncharitableness."

"That's right," the silent Irene concurred.

Only Mrs. Brown kept calm. Dr. Janet would see Marigold through, and she couldn't be in better hands. At tea-time Polly came up to say that Charlie was wanted for Daisy.

"Blast her!" the electrician broke out. "I'll come."

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Even Marigold smiled when she heard the news.

"She'll beat me by a head! It's a shame that animals should suffer." A spasm of pain made her clutch the lower rail of the bed where she stood. After a minute she said, "I've left a letter for you, Aunt Janet, in case anything went wrong. It's in the top drawer of the desk. You won't open it otherwise?"

"Of course not, darling, but I've no fear of that."

"Nor I. Look how Jesus saved P-Peter and heard my prayers. He wouldn't be so cruel to him now. Is it frightfully painful, a broken arm?"

"Nothing to what you are going through, and one nice thing is that when he's better they'll give him sick leave, and then he can come to you."

"I hadn't thought of that! How lovely! I must hurry up and get well." A gust smote the windows. "What a gale! I'd like to go up the tower to watch it."

"I shouldn't advise that," Janet, smiling, told her. "You might imitate an old patient of mine who had her baby on the stairs. She'd borne five children and she left it a little too late! Her excuse amused me: 'I wanted to finish me ironing.'"

Marigold giggled.

"I'm glad the baby's clothes are ready."

Charlie fought her way back after supper at the farm.

"The cow's done her duty, a heifer," she told Mrs. Brown. "And Daisy's all right. More than my arms are!" She stretched them wearily. "Mrs. Gee ain't as young as she was."

"You'd better have a hot bath with some Elliman's in it, to take out the stiffness."

"Okay." Charlie fidgeted. "How's Marigold?"

"She'll be worse before she's better. Would you like a cup of cocoa?"

"No, I'd like some beer."

The community retired to their rooms. All except Miss Plowden, who sat late by the fire, reading. At twelve o'clock, suspecting this, Janet went to the schoolroom, leaving Clara in charge. As she passed the stairs in the dimmed light she saw a figure huddled on the lowest step.

"You'd be better in bed, Charlie," Janet told her. "It's no good sitting up."

"How is she?"

"Very brave, but it won't be for a long time yet."

"Storm's bad as ever," Charlie muttered. "I've been up the tower to see, but it's black as hell. You could hear the waves dashing against the cliff."

Janet nodded, and moved on, sorry for the electrician, but a little amused by her obvious decision that Dr. McGregor would be safer. She found Miss Plowden asleep in her chair and packed her off, apologetic, startled as she mounted the staircase by a shadowy figure near the wall. Four hours later Janet heard a noise that puzzled her, like a thunderclap. When the chance came she slipped out to make sure that nothing was wrong. Charlie struggled up at Janet's approach.

"It was me. I opened the front door and I thought I'd never get it closed. Then it slammed—sorry! How is she?"

"Getting on with it. Shall I give her a message from you?"

"I don't suppose—yes! Say I'd ha' gone to Muss but you wouldn't let me."

"I'll do that if you'll turn in, Charlie. We may want you in the morning."

"She's bad then? Gosh, if only I could help her!" Charlie brushed a hand across her eyes. "I've been a bloody fool."

"You can make up for that by and by," Janet said softly. "Everything's natural, so go to bed."

The gale was beginning to abate next day when into the silent Castle came the thin cry of a new-born child. The schoolroom door open, Miss Plowden heard it and started to her feet. Thank God, it was over! Outside, she found Anna staring at the arched door. It seemed an eternity before Janet opened it.

"It's a boy! She's come through it well."

"Another forbidden man?" Anna was hiding her feelings, but Janet already had disappeared. "I'm going to tell Charlie."

"I'm here," a husky voice announced. "I heard the brat. A nice time we'll have with it, squawling!"

"I'm surprised at you, Charlotte." The Deaconess emerged from the library and looked at Miss Plowden. "Then it was?"

"Yes, a son. Dr. Janet's just told us."

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"I'm glad of that. Marigold wanted one."

It was strange how the advent of the baby affected the whole community. They were all anxious to see him, but Charlie was admitted first. She gazed down at the mite, and thought she had never seen anything so ugly.

"Takes after his father, I s'pose." The irony fell flat, for Marigold could see no flaw in her son. "How do you feel?"

"Fine!" Pale, between the golden plaits, she smiled at Charlie, for she had heard of the latter's vigil. "Will you post a letter for me when you go to Muss?"

"I'll do that." The electrician hesitated, searching for words. "You get well," she said at last. "And I'll teach the kid to swim."

Marigold giggled, then slipped out a hand, which Charlie pressed gingerly, as if it might break.

"Come again soon," she told the electrician, as Nurse Parr advanced with an air of purpose.

Early next morning Charlie went off to ring up Dr. McGregor from the tobacconist's shop, surprised at the calm way he took the news. He would come over that afternoon. Charlie felt annoyed with the good man. She had a long memory, and the Deaconess had explained to him that Janet did not practise. She was glad that the sea was still rough, but her passenger proved a good sailor. Arrived at the Castle, he went straight to his patient, but did not stay with her long.

"Congratulations," he said to Janet, as she carried him off to the library. "I knew she'd be all right with you."

"I admire your faith," Janet returned. "But I've something to explain."

"So have I. Let's sit down." He settled himself comfortably in the chair, and her nervousness increased. "Twelve years ago," he began, "I took a rare holiday, went to stay with an old friend in London. We were students together at Edinburgh, and now he's a well-known consultant. His wife was interested in a divorce case coming on and I took her to the court." He saw Janet's grey eyes widen. "We both disagreed with the verdict and considered the judge was as much to blame as the jury. More, as he must have foreseen the result, the end of a promising career."

"Then you've known all along!" Janet exclaimed.

"I have, my dear. I thought I recognised you when we met at the chemist's one day, and I went back later to ask your name. I'm not often mistaken in faces, nor, if it comes to that, in character. That was why I was pleased to come here and make your acquaintance."

"And you never said anything?"

"Why should I stir up painful memories? Judging by Marigold's condition you are a loss to the profession, though you needn't be afraid my opinion will reach the Medical Council." The doctor's blue eyes twinkled. "I'll confess that I had a wee joke with myself when I saw you with Michael Chaytor!"

"We're old friends," said Janet, absurdly. "Oh, here's your tea!" She was thankful for Anna's presence. "Miss Severn has been painting in your part of the world."

But the doctor would not let her off.

"That was a pretty spot where I met you, with the stream and the old bridge. You must take Miss Severn there." He had a few words with her, then as the door closed, returned to his former subject. "I shall hope to meet the playwright one day."

"He's in America now," Janet told him. "On a lecture tour trying to confound the Isolationists." Why not trust the kindly man? "But he'll be coming here on his return and I'll remember. I'll even let you into a secret: we're engaged to be married."

"You've taken your time about it," the doctor said with a chuckle, then his face sobered. "I hope you'll have every happiness. You deserve it."

In his last letter Michael had said that his lectures were over, but the trouble now was to get a seat on the Clipper, heavily booked in advance. Janet's surprise therefore, was great when a fortnight later outside the *Red Lion* at Muss she saw a familiar figure.

"You!" she cried, looking up into his face as he clasped her hand. "I thought you were still in New York. Oh, Michael, how nice!"

"Then come and have a drink? There wasn't time to let you know, as I only got back on Saturday." He led her through the quiet hotel to a courtyard behind it, pausing on the way to give his order to the waiter. "We'll sit here. You're looking better!"

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"That's from doing a bit of work successfully. I brought Marigold's son into the world on the fifth."

"You didn't?" His admiration was plain. "Wasn't that running a risk? For you, I mean."

"There was nothing else to be done. The worst gale for years and we couldn't send for Dr. McGregor. He understands, and has been charming. A true Scot; you can trust them in a crisis. Champagne again? How sinful!" She watched the waiter fill their glasses and presently raised hers. "To you, my dear." She drank, her eyes on his. "You're thinner!"

"I don't wonder. Those awful journeys, especially by night with no privacy, unless you're a millionaire. They may laugh at our little trains, but they don't know the comfort of a sleeper to yourself, with every convenience, even a cup of morning tea. Then directly you arrive, half-dead, you find a lunch or a dinner arranged, and are expected to be brilliant! Even after the lectures strangers come up to question you, in a friendly way as a rule, but I've been heckled too. About India, for instance. What business is it of theirs, sitting snug in this war? We shouldn't ask about their rule in the Phillippines, or—more to the point—what they've done with their Indians! Mind you, the hospitality is wonderful, though I was at a disadvantage." He drank his champagne, smiling at her, and touched his glass. "This! A party isn't a success unless half the guests are tight. Including young girls, who are carried out unconscious, and nobody seems to mind! We talk about our young people, but over there at a dance girls go out to their partner's car to drive to some dark corner. Here the man produces a flask, and they indulge in what they call 'necking'! Even the parents accept it."

"Disgusting!" But Janet smiled. "So now you're corrupting me? Though I'm hardly a *débutante*!"

"You might be this morning, your eyes so clear and your skin lovely. You never get older, Janet. It was a stroke of luck getting a seat in the Clipper through a man falling ill, a good chap who rang me up and I packed in ten minutes. By the way, what's become of Marigold's airman? About time he married her!" Michael listened to the latest news. "The uncle wrote? What is his name?"



"I don't know, though Solange confessed that she had been the go-between, directed the letters. I'd guessed this already, for why she should write constantly to a woman at a certain Rose Cottage in Lincolnshire I couldn't imagine. I wanted them to correspond, so I said nothing."

"Very wise. When Peter's ribs mend, a broken arm won't keep him long from getting about. Though they're careful in the R.A.F. and they get the best attention. Quite right! They bombed Stavanger again last night, but things don't seem to be going too well in Norway. As the Isolationists point out! The Navy's been splendid, but the Germans are very strong and there's a lot of treachery. Still, we generally lose at first, and then win." He refilled her glass, despite protest, and his own. "Now let's talk about ourselves. The next time I come I shall have a special licence in my pocket. Early in June. That suit you?"

"How can I say?" Janet's face was troubled. "It all depends on Marigold, and Peter's return."

"I don't agree, but we'll talk it over to-morrow during our drive. I've engaged the car and I'll meet you at the harbour, any time you like."

"I don't see how—" Janet began, and stopped at her lover's expression. "All right, I'll come!" Her face cleared. "I'll bring Anna to paint! We could drop her at that farm where we saw Dr. McGregor, and pick her up on our return. A good excuse?"

"Why haven't you the courage to tell them outright? It's no good putting it off. If you really mean to marry me?"

"You know I do. Don't look like that," she pleaded.

"Then if you've finished come up the lane. I've tipped the waiter and we can go out that way. This is a nice, quiet place. We might stay here a week for our honeymoon, do some drives, before we go to the cottage. Food's not bad, and whisky's cheap. There's an inducement!"

He was smiling now, a hand under her elbow as they passed through a gate near the garage. There was no one about in the lane and he held her closely, until a boy shot round the corner on a bicycle.

"He saw us!" Janet gasped.

"And you've lost your reputation? All the better! What's the matter?"

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"I've just remembered the shopping!" Laughing, she added, "What a mercy I called at the butcher's first!"

"So I shan't have to carry the meat, a gory parcel? Yes, I'm coming with you, so save your breath." They had reached the main street. "The post office first, I expect?"

Janet gave way. Like most women of strong character, she secretly enjoyed being ruled by the man she loved in small matters, if he gave her a choice in larger ones. She listened to his experiences in America, and told him in return of Charlie's reformation and Marigold's joy in her baby, so absorbed that she did not notice they were approaching the harbour until she saw the electrician staring at them. It was too late for Michael to turn back.

He followed her on board, and she introduced him, prepared for Charlie's scowl.

"You've a nice launch," he told her easily. "Bigger than I expected. Can you land at the village in it?"

"Not unless you're fond of wading." Charlie flung the parcels into the cabin, avoiding a bucket. "That's some bait for the lobsters," she told Janet. "They know how to charge!"

It looked very dead, Michael thought.

"You'd get it cheaper in the village when the boats come in," he suggested. "Why don't you rig up an out-board motor on your rowing one?"

"And where are we to get it?" Charlie retorted.

"I'll try and find out this afternoon," Amused, he smiled at Janet. "You want to be off, so I'll say good-bye, darling. Give my love to Marigold."

That had done it, he thought, as he watched the launch clear the harbour, Janet too stunned to wave. She broke the silence at last.

"I suppose you've guessed, Charlie, that I'm going to marry Mr. Chaytor?"

For a moment the electrician was speechless, then she broke out:

"Good God! You ought to be ashamed of yerself! What's to become of Marigold?"

"I'm not going to leave her."

"Doesn't he want to live with you?"

At the insolence in Charlie's voice Janet's temper rose.

"Yes, at the cottage. It's mine, under Mrs. Mappin's will. So I can have my husband there."

"I'll be damned! No one will let you?"

"Then they can go!" Janet caught herself in hand. "Marigold will be marrying, and I don't see why I should settle down to a lonely old age for the sake of the community. She knows, and is very pleased, a man for her Peter to talk to when he comes."

"As if he will," Charlie growled. "That broken arm is his latest excuse. He doesn't walk with it, does he?"

"No, but he has to obey orders. His uncle, who writes for him, calls Marigold his 'niece-to-be.' That's pretty definite. Besides, there's the baby."

"All gup!" Charlie was staring ahead over the sunlit water. "Men aren't so keen on their bastards. I ought to know—I was one meself!"

Janet hid her surprise and said softly:

"Hard luck!"

"It was, on my mother, a hard-working widow that he'd promised to marry. Our lodger, after my father died. Then off he went, and we never heard of him again. That's what men are!" The confession began to worry Charlie. "Nobody knows except you."

"It's perfectly safe." Janet caught the other's sidelong glance. "You ought to be able to trust me by now."

"I do," Charlie muttered. "Except—*must* you marry this man?"

"I want to. He's been fond of me for twelve years, a long time to wait. When Anna and Miss Plowden go—she won't stay on drawing her salary for nothing—who have I to talk to?"

"There's I-reen," Charlie suggested, with an involuntary grin. "I'll admit they're a dud lot." Her expression changed. "But Marigold won't leave the island?"

"She might, and that worries me, Charlie. Her husband may want her to live with his people. On the east coast of England, I gather, but don't repeat this. There was a raid on Yorkshire last week, and if Hitler invades the Netherlands he'll get nearer still, and probably, secure air bases there. Then attacks will begin in earnest."

"She won't risk it," Charlie declared. "Afraid for the baby. As it is, if there's an alarm I'm to bolt with it to

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the cellar. I've rigged up a little berth there, with a blanket in the furnace-room, dry and handy."

"That's well thought out. But don't drop him!"

"No fear!" Charlie realised she had been led off the track. "It was my father as gave me this." She touched her scarred cheek. "Came in drunk and frightened mum, and she clapped her hands to her face. So a neighbour told me. Do you wonder I hate men?"

"You've had every provocation," Janet agreed. "I had some myself when that case went against me. But there are good men as well as bad. Mr. Chaytor won't worry you, and he may be useful. We want someone to keep down the rabbits, overrun with them."

"I could learn to shoot."

"And who is to teach you?" Janet let this sink in. "He could go fishing, too; he's fond of the sea. No one will have to wait on him. We shall take our meals in the Abels' old parlour, which Mrs. Brown doesn't use, and I shall engage a young maid, probably Jean's niece, who has just left school. She can clean the cottage and bring in our meals."

"You've thought it all out," Charlie said, gloomily. "Mrs. Mappin would turn in her grave. Not that I'd care! She wasn't good to Marigold, and that's how it all began." A faint smile widened her mouth. "The Deaconess will go up in the air!"

"She'll come down again." Janet saw she was gaining the day and had a happy idea. "Mr. Chaytor will bring his car next time, and keep it at Muss. Would you like to learn to drive, Charlie? It might be useful."

Silence. They were drawing near to the island.

"Shouldn't mind," said Charlie at last. "I s'pose that means I've got to be civil." For she had made up her mind. Let 'em all come, so long as she was friends with Marigold. "Do you think Mr. Chaytor would help me to scrape the bottom of the barge? Needs two."

"I daresay." What was she letting poor Michael in for? Serve him right for calling her "darling." She would tell him that was one of his jobs to-morrow! Janet repressed a chuckle.

"Did you remember the whiting?" Charlie asked. "I-reen's run out, and I want to draw a line on the lawn. I've told Ruth if she crosses it I'll box her ears. She's

no business up that end, and Marigold doesn't like her breathing into the baby's face. So if Ruth complains you'll know what's happened."

"Yes, but you mustn't hurt her, Charlie. She's deformed."

"And makes a good thing out of it! I'll never forgive her for trying to frighten Marigold before the baby was born." Charlie glowered. "She's a wrong 'un." They had reached the jetty and as Janet stepped ashore the electrician detained her. "Is what you've told me a secret, doctor?"

"No. I shall want the launch early to-morrow to go in for a drive with Mr. Chaytor, so people had better know of the engagement." Janet saw on Charlie's face a fleeting admiration. "You could have another walk, if you like, and we'd pick you up on our way back. Now take those parcels to Mrs. Brown. I'll be seeing her presently."

The die was cast, and Janet went to Marigold's room.

In bed, against the pillows, a book on her lap, she was looking through the open window at the baby in his pram. Solange in a deck-chair beyond him was busy with a strip of lace work, and nearer at hand Chump was fully outstretched on the grass, pretending to be a big dog. The new animal that cried and was hairless puzzled him, his dear mistress too, so lazy, never played any of their old games. She had not, apparently, noticed that one of her canvas shoes was missing. He stirred, wondering if he had better go and bury it deeper under the bush with his favourite bone.

"Oh, you're back!" the girl cried. "Any letters?"

"One for Solange."

"Let's see it." No line under her name. "It's from her brother. She'll be so pleased! Do take it out to her."

She had not seemed disappointed, Janet thought, as she crossed the lawn. Was the baby taking the place in her heart of the absent lover? She had known this occur before in a husband's case, to his mortification. But when she returned Marigold said:

"Sit down. I've been thinking, Aunt Janet. Although I'm longing to see Piers it's just as well, perhaps, that he can't come at present. I want to be fit and jolly, or he'd be so disappointed! And I daren't tell him about

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Baby yet; it might throw him back. So I'm trying to be patient." She saw Janet nod approvingly, and ran on, "Then, I want Baby's hair to grow; it's going to be fair, and he'll look so nice with chicken fluff! His eyes are as blue as Peter's, with the same light in them, like the flame of methylated spirits." Her face, with the warm contentment of young and healthy motherhood, became mischievous. "It will be funny to see him in clothes! I hope he'll wear his uniform."

"Instead of your mother's winter coat?"

"So you guessed!" Marigold laughed. "You are clever, Aunt Janet! I had to give him my safety pins to keep him proper, and he put my hair bows in his pocket, as they would drop off. I'll never forget the day when poor mother found them! I thought I'd sink through the floor. Then you came and saved me, you darling! As you always do." She smiled serenely. "But you look as if you had something up your sleeve?"

"So I have. Who do you think I met outside the *Red Lion* at Muss?"

"Not Uncle Michael?"

"Yes. Just back from America, and we behaved very badly, went in and drank champagne."

"Isn't it nice?"

"How do you know?" Janet challenged.

"That's a secret! No, I'll tell you. Peter brought a bottle to the Ram and we swam out and drank each other's health. When are you going to be married?"

"In June, if all goes well. Though I hope he won't find the cottage too small. I told Charlie coming home that we were engaged. Had to! Your Uncle Michael forced my hand."

"Good for him! Won't it be nice when they're both here? We can have picnics on the launch, and I'll be able to see the shops, now I've a respectable figure. What did Charlie say?"

"Plenty! Still, she toned down at the end, when I suggested that Michael could teach her to drive his car."

"That was a brilliant idea! She's always longed to. Will she tell the others?"

"Probably. I'm not looking forward to dinner!" Janet saw that Marigold's cheeks were flushed. "I'm

going. You're not to excite yourself, but behave like Daisy."

"Chew the cud?" Marigold laughed. "I want to see the calf. When shall I get up, Aunt Janet?"

"Next week if it's fine you could lie in the garden. If Dr. McGregor approves.

"I'm your patient, not his!" Marigold called after her.

How good life was! It only needed Piers to complete it. The baby began to cry and presently, Madame Ducroy rose, talked to him soothingly, and then lifted him out of his pram to turn him over, giving him gentle pats on the back. Although a little was good for his lungs she disapproved of long fits of crying that ended in exhaustion. No *nou-nou* in her country would allow it, without attempting to find the cause. A baby could feel neglected, like anyone else, she told Marigold, and sometimes, there was a reason for his distress. "Per'aps ze breeze?" This had become a standing joke between the girl and "Nurse," for Clara had dropped the "Parr." A Nannie held a good position, and was not expected to do housework. She listened to Janet's teaching and kept the baby scrupulously clean, was at present ironing his clothes. Janet went in to remind her that it was nearly dinner-time and then sought Mrs. Brown in the kitchen. She had heard the news from Charlie and taken the engagement well. A surprise, but anything was preferable to Dr. Janet leaving the island. Wouldn't Mr. Chaytor feel cramped in the cottage? Still, not so bad in summer, with the view and the breeze off the sea, and it would be nice to have a man about the place, and company for that other one when he came, besides shooting the rabbits, and she hoped Dr. Janet would be happy and not listen to the rest, above all, the Deaconess. She ran down like a clock, and Janet kissed her. Irene, basting the meat, listened and said nothing, but Amy, bustling in for the plates, relieved her feelings: "You don't expect me to congratulate you, Dr. Janet, I hope? I couldn't, reely."

Janet ignored her, and went in search of Anna, who was only too pleased that her friend was happy, and would have someone to look after her in what might be a crucial page in British history.

"He should take you to America," she suggested.

"Never! I'm not a quitter," Janet said indignantly.

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"I'll stay in my own country. I'd go to London when Marigold's affairs are settled, but Michael won't hear of it. I want him to be happy here. He needs a long holiday, so my next job will be to protect him from what he calls my 'wild women'!"

"You'll do that," Anna laughed. "Tell him I'm tame, and will be glad to have someone from outside to talk to, a man with brains."

Miss Plowden shared Anna's taste. By habit an on-looker, she was interested in the changes since Mrs. Mappin's death. What would be the effect of a male element among these feminists? If she remained to see it. She had already suggested that it was time for her to leave, but Marigold was up in arms. When Piers went back to France she wished to go on with her lessons, particularly the scripture ones, and the "rules of poetry." She had sent some verses of her own to him, and he had thought them very good. Miss Plowden repressed a smile. What lover wouldn't? The governess, secretly relieved, promised to stay; it was a little early for her pupil to finish her education. The Deaconess added the final touch to her decision by saying that she could undertake any religious instruction, for the secret had come out. Miss Plowden, who disliked Ritualism, dug her toes in.

Janet was thinking of this as she went in to dinner, and was met by a stony silence. Taking her seat, she turned to Selina.

"Such a lovely day! We're fortunate, as I hear they have rain in England. From Mr. Chaytor, whom I found at Muss."

"So Charlie informed us." The Deaconess helped herself to a chop, handed by Amy, still bristling. "Is it true, Dr. Janet, that you are engaged to him?"

"Yes, though we shan't be married just yet. I want to see Marigold's affairs settled first."

"Naturally." Everybody was listening, and the lady raised her voice. "We shall miss you."

"Only for a week." Janet outlined her plans briefly. "The cottage is mine, as you know."

Ruth could no longer hold her tongue.

"But he can't live here! Men are forbidden!"

"Were," Janet corrected. "But when Marigold is married her husband will have every right to do so." She



saw Polly's eyes bulging, and she smiled at Mrs. Gee. "You have no objection, I hope, to Mr. Chaytor as your neighbour? He will keep away from the farm, except to shoot the rabbits."

"I'd be glad of that. They're a nuisance, have eaten all Polly's veg., and besides, we want them for food. It will seem strange at first," Mrs. Gee said comfortably. "But we'll get used to him. I wish he'd find me a terrier to keep down the rats."

"He'll do that," Janet promised. "He is looking to-day for an out-board motor to go on *The Last Hope*. Then we'll be able to get to the village. A little more life for us all."

"We don't want it!" Amy exploded. "It's not fair on Mrs. Mappin to do this after her death. It's tiking advantage!"

"Shut up!" said Charlie rudely. "Dr. Janet can do as she likes."

"He's quite old," the silent Irene brought out. "I saw him from the garden when he went."

How pleased Michael would be, Janet thought.

"A very clever man," Miss Plowden interposed. "I must offer my congratulations, Dr. Janet." She smiled. "Which we seem to have overlooked. Will he write here?"

"Not at first, I hope, as he needs a holiday badly. After his lecture tour in America—British Propaganda. He won't be here permanently, just come and go when he can get away. Still, the cottage will be nice and quiet for his work."

"And what about yours?" Anna asked, with intention.

"I haven't written a line since Mrs. Mappin was taken ill."

"No, it's about time you thought of yourself."

"I agree," the Deaconess said sweetly. "You should go away for a good change, Dr. Janet. I can easily look after the island."

So this was what had lain beneath her suave manner.

"I could help you," Amy proffered. "Write your letters. You mustn't strine your eyes."

"My eyes are quite good," the Deaconess snapped. Here Polly leaned forward.

"Shall all of us go to the village?"

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"And tell them about Marigold's baby," Rachel said spitefully. "As it is, some fisherman will hear him crying."

"Say 'e is mine?" Solange beamed at the company. "It would not 'urt. I come 'ere *enceinte*, and 'ave nevaire left ze island, so no one remark my figure, and——"

"No, no," the Deaconess interrupted. "That would not do at all. His birth will have to be registered when Marigold is fit to go to Muss."

"Which won't be until Peter arrives," Janet said dryly.

"And he'd better marry her first," Mrs. Gee added, with a placid smile. "It's no good looking forward to trouble."

Nevertheless, as the days passed Janet worried in secret. A letter came from Sir George to say there would have to be a slight operation, as the bones, X-rayed, had not set properly. She talked this over with Dr. McGregor, who asked the name of the hospital. Janet could not tell him, but pointed out that they could not make direct enquiries without knowing who Peter was. Marigold was still afraid of getting him into trouble, and had let slip the other day that he might lose his wings.

"That's absurd! If he marries without permission he can't be punished. It's a mere form to prevent the widow from claiming an indemnity if her husband is killed. I gather he is well off?"

"Apparently. He sent her an expensive Christmas present, the tortoiseshell set on her dressing-table." Janet sighed impatiently. "It's a long time to wait, but luckily, she's absorbed in the baby. Another thing is, she wants to be quite well first."

"These young people," the doctor chuckled. Then his face became grave. "It's a good thing for her that he's on the shelf. The *Luftwaffe* is showing its strength, and no one seems to know what is happening in the North."

For there had been fresh "withdrawals," and an American paper had prophesied that the British would be "kicked out of Norway!" So Michael, furious, wrote and enclosed the cutting. On the top of this came the news that Germany had invaded Holland and Belgium. In the storm that followed Chamberlain resigned, and Churchill formed a new National Government. The Deaconess wrung her hands.

"Fancy asking the Labour leaders to join the Cabinet! But I've never trusted Mr. Churchill."

"Nor I," said Amy.

A few days later Sir George wrote to say that as Piers was going on well he was returning home himself, to organise the Local Defence Volunteers in his district, but hoped to return to town in a week or so. Piers had lost a friend, whom he called "Tiny," in Coastal Command, and was depressed, poor boy, so Marigold must send him a nice letter, which Sir George would answer later on, as the arm was in plaster again. Naturally, Piers resented being out of the fighting, with the thrilling reports of the R.A.F. bombing enemy columns and communications in Belgium. "Between ourselves," his uncle added, "I am thankful that he is safe. His squadron has suffered severely, so although it must seem long to you, his delayed recovery may be a blessing, and you can thank God for the respite."

Marigold did so fervently, mourned for Tiny and controlled her impatience. She was allowed to go to the farm for tea, and see the calf, which she besought Mrs. Gee to keep, but the farmer shook her head. There was not sufficient pasturage, and it would be sold. Her surprise and pleasure were great when Janet gave her the money, as a little return for all her goodness to Marigold. Polly came racing up to borrow a catalogue, as Ma was giving her a dress, but she wasn't to choose the same as Marigold's, and would Dr. Janet write for it? Pink, for choice. Then Ruth was convicted of a heinous offence. Stealing up to the pram she had pinched the baby! The community boiled over, to Miss Plowden's secret amusement. Ruth was locked in her room, where Mrs. Brown brought her for tea a slice of stale bread and a glass of water, Charlie's suggestion. Rachel's pleadings with Janet, and Amy's with the Deaconess, were in vain. "She deserves it," Selina pronounced. "And she must be punished. I'm surprised!"

These home excitements almost blotted out the increasingly bad war news, the Dutch, overwhelmed, ceasing resistance, with a sinister rumour that the Germans had broken through the French lines. There followed Churchill's first broadcast as Prime Minister, and grave warning: There would come "a battle for our island—that will be the struggle." The effect of this on the community

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interested Miss Plowden, everyone so nice to Janet, her engagement forgiven! Mrs. Gee had a shock when she heard on the wireless that the Excess Profits Tax would be fixed at 100 per cent. Did that mean she would have to give the money for the calf to the Government? Janet reassured her, and Polly's dress arrived, to be overlooked when King Leopold, without warning the British and French Commands, capitulated to Germany.

"Now we're in the soup," Charlie announced. "Blast him!"

The long fighting retreat to Dunkirk began, with the "last stand" at Calais, and the increasing gallantry of the R.A.F., to end with that of the "little ships" and the lines of patient men on the beaches. Solange was in despair, for she could get no news of Pierre. Where was he in this terrible reverse? White-faced and sleepless, she would go to Marigold for comfort. Her poor country overrun by the Boche! What would be the end of it? Strangely enough, it was Charlie who gave her hope. We'd landed thousands of Frenchies and he would be among them. To Marigold she added that it was "damn' nice" of us when we could have saved more of our own men, and we'd never get a thank you! So a man at the tobacconist's had said, his son in a Highland regiment, still fighting on the Somme.

To cheer Marigold, Janet took her to Muss, and dragged her away from the shops to return to her baby. At the harbour they saw a man in a shabby French uniform talking to Charlie, and Janet quickened her steps.

"I believe that's Solange's brother!"

A true guess, and they bundled him into the launch, where Marigold, hypnotised, listened to his adventures. He had obtained leave to visit his sister, who probably thought him dead, and he proposed to spend a week with her at Muss. He was "enchanted" to meet Janet, of whom he had heard so much, and hoped she would spare Madame Ducroy. It was infinitely good of her to convey him to the Castle for their happy reunion, and give his sister time to pack. But how could they return? Charlie solved the difficulty. She would run them back after dinner if Dr. Janet approved. She did not like the way he looked at Marigold out of his dark, admiring eyes! The girl felt easier in her mind. Awkward if they both slept at

the Castle and Ruth spied on them—as she certainly would! When they reached the jetty she ran on ahead to warn Solange, who blessed the Madonna and chattered excitedly, then became practical. Miss Plowden proffered the school-room and the pair vanished from sight, before the community heard of Pierre's arrival. Janet decided that at dinner Amy had better wait on them—since she didn't know French! The Deaconess, blissfully unconscious of Janet's doubts, went in later to congratulate the guest on his escape, and hear first-hand news of Dunkirk. She talked to him whilst Solange packed, to look at the latter disapprovingly on her return, scented and heavily powdered in contrast to her vermillion lips. Everyone lingered in the refectory to catch a glimpse of the Frenchman, and quivered when in the hall he kissed Selina's hand, believing her to be a married woman. Marigold breathed, "Good luck!" in Solange's ear, and was tenderly embraced. In the distance the baby wailed. The last straw, Rachel observed—and how many more men were coming to the island? Only Janet remembered that the clothes Pierre wore were probably all he possessed and pressed money on Solange, recommending the *Red Lion*.

"If I were stranded in France," she murmured, "I should expect to be helped by our Ally."

"You 'ave a goodness inconceivable!" Solange exclaimed, and carefully counted the notes as she went down the jetty.

## CHAPTER XVI

MARIGOLD opened the schoolroom door in search of a book, and halted with a quickened breath. Through the open window she could hear the putter of a motor-boat. One glance was sufficient; the next minute she was racing down the stairs. She had seen an old fisherman with a solitary passenger in grey flannels, his hat drawn down over his eyes. The front door slammed behind her, the breeze from the sea caught her blue cotton skirt, with a flash of white knees where the sunburn ended, and, her golden plaits streaming behind her, she reached

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the end of the jetty, to seize his arm as he stepped ashore.

"Oh, *Piers!*" Clutching him, half-crying, half-laughing, she panted, "At last!"

The boatman looked on disapprovingly. He had warned his fare that landing was prohibited. Who was this shameless lass? Such hugging and kissing! He coughed, and spat overboard, to hear a husky male voice:

"You're just the same!" His hands on her shoulders, the lover peered into her face, and became aware of an audience. "Where can we talk in peace?"

"In the Castle, of course! It's mine now," Marigold laughed. "So come along! Why didn't you let me know?"

"I couldn't. No use sending a telegram." Piers kept up with her rapid pace, and she threw open the nail-studded door. Perplexed, he asked, "Upstairs?"

"Yes! We're on two levels—you'll see!" She watched him grasp the rail with his left hand. "How is the arm?"

"Pretty good."

They mounted, dazzled by the strong light in the hall, for the sun had reached the west.

"This way!" Marigold led him down the two steps on to the gravel path, then the trio cut in the grass, her one thought to show him the baby. "There's Aunt Janet!"

Her excited voice carried, and Janet looked up from the book on her knee where she sat not far from the pram. At once she guessed the truth, and rose hurriedly to meet the pair.

"This is my husband, Flight Lieutenant Chomeley," the girl announced proudly.

"*Husband?*" broke from Janet's lips.

"Yes! We were married on the Ram." Her laughing face turned to Piers. "Weren't we, darling?"

All Janet could get out was, "When?"

"Last July," Piers told her. "In the old Scottish way, before witnesses. Perfectly legal then. My solicitors have seen to that."

How stiff he was, Marigold thought, just as he had been before Tiny and Robin at first. But she could not wait.

"It's all right," she told Janet, and hurried Piers on to the sleeping child.

"Look! What do you think of your son?"

"Good God!" All the colour left his face. "You don't mean—it isn't true, Goldie?"

At the brittle note in his voice Janet frowned.

"Of course it's true! Isn't he sweet?"

Instead of replying Piers wheeled round, and was off blindly across the lawn. They saw him stumble up the steps, barge into the doorway where the wall cut off the kitchen garden, and vanish.

"What's wrong?" Marigold asked piteously.

"You've given him a shock, my dear. I thought he was going to faint. Is he just out of hospital?"

"Yes—I don't know! I ought to have thought," the girl said penitently, and the tears rose to her eyes. "I've spoilt it all!"

"Only for the moment." Janet checked her next movement. "No, don't go after him! He'll want a little time to recover." She was more worried than she cared to show. "I think I'll take him a drink. You stay here"—a sound caught her ears—"and stop that baby crying!" Something for her to do.

"All right," Marigold answered, with a catch in her breath. "But bring him back!"

Janet went indoors and mixed a whisky and soda, then with a glance at the girl leaning over the pram hurried in search of the missing husband. Married? And the baby legitimate. It seemed too good to be true. But that was a sick man. She found him staring at a row of peas.

"I've brought you a drink," she said to his back, saw him start, and turn his dark head.

"Oh, thanks!" He took the glass from her, his hand twitching. "Very good of you."

"Then drink it down." The sun, aslant, picked out his features, and Janet realised the reason for his unsteady progress. The left eye was artificial! Her heart sank, and soothingly, she said, "It will do you good. A tedious journey."

"Yes—don't go!" He took a deep draught, frowning, and peered at her. "The fact is I'm in a jam. You've seen this"—he tapped his left cheek-bone, and Janet nodded—"though Goldie hasn't, she's too excited. I wouldn't mind if the other were all right, but it isn't. I came here to see if I could get out of the marriage."

"Why?" Startled, Janet asked.

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"Pretty obvious, isn't it?" His voice rasped. "Fancy *Goldie* with a blind husband!"

At the pain and frustration in the words Janet felt a lump rise in her throat.

"Why should you be?" she managed to get out. "Your right eye is bound to be weak for a time, and a good deal depends on your general health. What do the doctors say?"

"They differ." Piers put up a hand to his brow. "I'm so sick of it all! May get better, may get worse, something about the optic nerve. I can't see to read or write, everything in a mist when I try."

"Very natural. Why not finish your whisky?"

Mechanically, he obeyed her.

"That's why the child bowled me over. Can't get out of it now," he muttered.

"It would be very wrong if you did, after all Marigold's gone through for your sake. Unmarried, we believed, and when her condition became known despised and condemned by the women here. I did my best to protect her, as well as I could, but it was her love for you that kept her up."

"Why didn't she tell you?" he broke out.

"She was afraid we might make enquiries and land you in disgrace. She believed that you might lose your wings."

"Gosh! I *told* her that," he groaned. "I was so afraid she'd let things out, be beaten and treated cruelly. Afraid of her mother! I saw her portrait in Goldie's room, and she looked as hard as iron. Anything might happen on this island! I worried until I heard from her two months later, but she said she was very fit, so how could I guess? When was the baby born?"

"On the fifth of April, the day your uncle wrote to tell her of your crash. It was a mercy he hid the truth."

"I told him to. Though it's been difficult to keep up."

He had done it cleverly, Janet thought, reserving the name of the hospital, probably an ophthalmic one. But time was passing.

"Now you must tell her everything. She's strong enough to bear it, and besides, it mayn't be as bad as you think. And you must admire your son. She has been longing to show him to you, and is disappointed, poor child!"



"I'll go!" Absently, he thrust his empty glass at Janet, and she took it with a warning:

"Look out for those steps down to the lawn."

But already, his hand was outstretched to the gatepost, such a fine figure of youth that life seemed too cruel. She watched him reach the lower level in safety, then turned back. She could not spy on the lovers, and she had no fear of Marigold's reaction once the first blow was past. She would mother him, her deepest instinct. His sight might improve when his nervous system recovered from the double shock, for he would never fly again. This could be a mercy in disguise; the life of an airman was short. Nevertheless, Janet's heart was heavy as she made her way to the kitchen. What an end to their wild romance. . . .

Mrs. Brown, listening, was overwhelmed. They had all misjudged the poor child! This seemed to upset her more than the fear of blindness. Married they'd be, like her brother-in-law's grandmother, and nobody could deny it, not even the Deaconess. She entered into Janet's plans for the pair to have the suite to themselves. Nurse could sleep in the Abels' old room, and Piers must have every comfort. Of course he would stay in his wife's house, Mrs. Brown agreed, wiping her eyes with her apron, and if anyone objected they could go! A man who had risked his life for his country. A Nero, that's what he was!

Janet disentangled this, for the housekeeper rarely dropped an aitch, and went off to search for Miss Plowden, after a glance through the refectory window. The lovers looked strangely peaceful, Piers in a deck-chair with Chump sprawling on his knee, and Marigold leaning forward from hers, listening, absorbed. There were traces of tears on her face, but a tender smile curved her lips. No sign of the baby, which puzzled Janet, until leaving Miss Plowden divided between thankfulness and grief, she found Nurse in the tower room, and the pram on the path outside.

"I fetched him," she explained. "That's Marigold's man, I suppose? I didn't like to disturb them, but it's time Baby was fed. She ought to keep to the hours." When Janet told her the story, Nurse softened. "Well, for once ten minutes won't hurt, though she must come soon, he's hungry." The "heir" was complaining loudly. "Married? That's a surprise! For everyone," Nurse

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emphasized with a broad smile. "Amy will have to climb down! It's a sad thing about his eye, but the other may improve. Sympathy—I've known it before."

Janet agreed, and looked at the clock, then at the sufferer, tiny fists clenched in the air. She made her way round to the pair on the lawn.

"Don't get up," she told Piers. "I've only come to say you must spare Marigold for a little. Your son wants her."

"Oh, poor darling!" The girl sprang to her feet, and looked round blankly. "Where is he?"

"With Nurse, who is waiting for you."

"I saw her sneak him off and thought it was very tactful," Piers observed. "Good lungs! Won't you sit down?" he asked Janet.

"I'll take Marigold's chair for a minute." She did so, thinking he looked better. "Isn't that dog heavy?"

"No, a nice pup. I've always liked Cockers." His eyes followed his wife, and he lowered his voice. "She took it very well. Has her own cure." He smiled, with a glimpse of white teeth, and Janet saw how attractive he was. "Prayer! I put her on to that by giving her a Bible, it seems. Queer sort of gift to your girl, but she'd never read it, and I thought by and by my uncle would be startled. He's old-fashioned, goes to Church and all that, though a good sportsman. My father had the family living, and when he died Uncle George became my guardian. It's a nice old place and I think Goldie will like it, in Lincolnshire, on the Wold. But I shan't take her there yet, too near the coast now Hitler means business. It might upset what she calls 'the heir'! And I don't know my plans." The shadow had fallen again. "I shall have to go up in three months for a medical board—a farce!"

"It mayn't be." Better let him talk, Janet decided, and then he must try to get this dread off his mind. "How is your arm now?"

"Pretty good. That was in landing, the other in a party with two Messerschmitts, a bit of metal—I don't know how I got the kite home, but luckily, the other eye lasted out. My navigator couldn't take over, as he was badly wounded, though he's pulled round since, I'm glad to hear. His mother came to see me in hospital, a binding affair and, luckily, the sister cut it short. One of those nattering women who can't stop. Like me!" he added with a twist

of his lips, and changed the subject. "Marigold says I may stay here. Is that convenient?"

"More than convenient. We'll love to have you, Peter—if I may call you that?"

"Call me anything you like, but my name is Piers!"

"Piers, then." Janet smiled. "Marigold disguised it. I suppose you're at the village inn. I suggest you should stay there to-night, have a good rest and come over to-morrow afternoon. That will give us time to get the suite ready. Nurse can go to another room and you can have the tower one."

She was prepared for his objection:

"Can't I share Goldie's? If I promise to be good? Just to know she's there. Please, Aunt Janet?"

The cajoling voice was hard to resist. Janet tried another tack:

"You've forgotten the baby! He may cry at night, and you need unbroken sleep."

"I should hear him just the same next door." Piers frowned. "Who is this coming?"

Janet looked across the lawn.

"The Deaconess, I'm afraid. She was Mrs. Mappin's cousin."

"I know, the lady *curé*! Let's get it over."

He pushed Chump off his knee and rose as Selina advanced, to address him in her neighing voice:

"I don't want to disturb you, only to offer my congratulations on your narrow escape." She took his hand and gazed at him. "Welcome to our island—I didn't quite catch your name?"

"Chomeley."

"One of the Yorkshire Cholmondeleys?"

"No, we spell it a different way." He did so, and saw her eyes brighten.

"That is curious. Years ago I met a Sir George Chomeley, of Spurlby Abbey, when we were staying with the Bishop of Lincoln."

"My uncle, with whom I live." Piers looked amused, guessing her thought. "I'm his heir. I left him busy with the Local Defence Volunteers, and an old hedger and ditcher sharpening his billhook to have a swipe at a parachutist's legs! They're all very keen."

"Yes, it's wonderful how the country has risen to the

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crisis. Now do sit down." The Deaconess turned to Janet, who was not going to offer her seat. "I thought I'd warn you that they're coming up from the swimming pool."

"Thanks. Piers is having tea in Marigold's room."

"Very wise." Selina's glance returned to the airman. "You can imagine what a relief it was to me to hear you were married."

"It must have been," said Piers dryly. "Although I should have thought you could have trusted Marigold."

The Deaconess reared up her long neck.

"Such a child! But then you are *both* so young," she said, with an air of correction, and moved. "I mustn't keep you standing. I shall hope to see you again."

With this, and a forced smile, she departed. Piers chuckled, dropping into his chair.

"Her wish will be granted," he told Janet. "Though it isn't a mutual one! Is that another dog over there?"

A shadow had moved in the garden doorway.

"No, our hunchback, Ruth. Don't encourage her, Piers. She's not allowed to cross that white line on the lawn, as she plays tricks on Baby, and she wasn't kind to your wife." She saw his expression harden, and added, "Still, Marigold has had some good friends."

"You the best of them," he said, gravely. "I've been wanting to thank you."

"You must thank Mrs. Gee, our farmer," Janet, inwardly pleased, told him. "She put her up for weeks before her confinement, kept her safe and happy. Then, there was Anna Severn."

"The painter?"

"Yes. By the way, she's at your inn, has been sketching a gypsy encampment in a glen near there, but returns to-morrow. Have you seen her!"

"No. I only arrived this morning, and I was alone at lunch."

"I expect she took sandwiches with her. From first to last she has stood by your Goldie." Janet's grey eyes widened. "Why, that explains it! The G on her tortoiseshell set. You should have seen her delight when it came."

"It's a code." Piers smiled mysteriously. "Means more than you think!"

"I guessed that in *The Times*." She saw him start,

then throw back his head and laugh. "Michael Chaytor put me up to it, but I only found one message. I suppose they stopped when Madame Ducroy entered into the game."

"You know everything! I shall pull Goldie's leg." Piers screwed up his eye. "Isn't that her at the window?"

"Yes, she's coming out. Mrs. Brown will bring in your tea, our housekeeper, once Mrs. Mappin's cook, a treasure."

"Nothing like a good old servant," Piers agreed. "My uncle says they're about the only gentlefolk left! He'd sooner have a yarn with our butler than talk to a new neighbour of ours, who oozes money and pomp! Well, darling," he greeted the girl. "Baby full up?"

Janet left them, remembering Michael's remark anent a changing world. Those two would get on, she thought, and it would be good for Piers. Despite his brave attempt to be normal, those twitching hands gave him away. She cursed Hitler for bringing death and desolation on the world, obeying the law of Hate. This island was becoming a healthier place, with its new rule of freedom and love. At times she had condemned herself for disloyalty to the dead, but now her conduct seemed justified.

Meanwhile, the girl had taken Piers indoors, to watch his reaction.

"What a gorgeous room! I could keep a harem." He drew his wife down on the sofa, and laid his head on her breast. "This is nice. Oh, damn them all!" For there had come a tap at the door.

"It's only tea," Marigold soothed him, as he dragged himself erect. "Come in!" she called.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Mrs. Brown, wheeling the wagon. With the tact which comes from the heart she avoided the Deaconess's mistake. "If I'd known you were coming I'd have made a fresh cake."

"Instead of 'char and a wad'? That's what we call tea and a bun. It looks very nice." She was nearer now, the same plump body, although her hair was grey, and he risked it. "You don't seem a day older than when you scolded me for getting Goldie wet at Worthing."

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Brown stared at him. "You don't mean to say you were the young gentleman that built sand castles with her?"

"I was—it's an old affair! I'll tell you another thing."

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Piers grinned. "It was your brother-in-law's grandmother that showed us the way to get married, so we owe you a lot."

"Fancy that! I *am* pleased," said Mrs. Brown, and saw how tired he looked. "You have your tea now, sir, and then a lay down. I'm seeing after your boatman."

She bustled out, and Piers drew a breath of relief.

"A good soul."

"Yes. Sugar?" Marigold asked him.

"One lump. You ought to know that, my sweet, considering we've been married nearly a year!" He took his cup and sipped the hot tea. "It seems like a dream being with you again. I'm afraid of waking up!"

"You won't be when you sleep in here. It's lovely in the mornings."

"But I'm to be put in the tower room. So Dr. Janet says."

"What nonsense!" Marigold was indignant. "So dark and gloomy! You'll have a bed next to mine."

"She declared the baby will wake me." For another idea was worrying him. "Does it cry at night?"

"Sometimes. All babies do." Her smile died away, and to gain time she handed him the cucumber sandwiches. "Try these." She was nerving herself for a sacrifice. Piers must be her first thought. "Baby could go into Nurse's new room, and be brought to me. A bit early for you, I'm afraid. Still——"

"You don't like the idea?" Piers interrupted.

"I don't mind," she said bravely. "He's too young to miss me much, though I'm sure he knows I'm his mummy."

"He'd be a fool if he didn't!" Piers hesitated, then made a confession. "I sometimes call out in my sleep, so a man in the same ward told me. A sort of nightmare. It might upset you?"

"It wouldn't! I've had nightmares myself." Marigold smiled at him sweetly. "I'd come across and hold your hand. Do you dream of the plane crashing?"

"Not exactly. Of fire."

"But it didn't catch fire?" she asked, with a cold touch of fear.

"Lord, no! They got us out easily, but we brought down one Messerschmitt in flames, and dreams get mixed. These sandwiches are good."

"Then have another?"

"I will. Remember our feast in the wood, and your first taste of champagne on the Ram? Doesn't it seem ages ago?" He sighed. "Did my uncle tell you old Tiny had gone for a Burton? In the North Sea, close to the place where those German devils machine-gunned the men on a lightship. If only I could get at them!" He checked himself, for his cup was rattling in the saucer. "Robin's fine! He came to see me in hospital."

"How nice." Those poor twitching hands, she thought, once so strong and steady. "We must have him to stay with us some day."

"And what about the nuns?" he asked, wickedly.

"They're getting reformed!" She refilled his cup. "Sugar?"

"What a memory! One lump, please." Piers passed her a bun. "Put that in your cake-hole. The nicest one I've ever kissed!"

"Better than Maggie's?"

"Much—I don't know!" He tried to cover the slip. "I'll tell you one thing: I haven't kissed another girl since we parted. Not even in Paris!"

"Did you want to?" she asked, surprised.

"No, but it's a bit ropey when other men are enjoying themselves. And they didn't guess I was married." He grinned. "Not that that makes much difference!"

"It should," Marigold said severely. "I shouldn't dream of kissing another man."

"You haven't had much chance," he reminded her. "Never mind! You must have a refresher course."

"Well, anyhow, I don't care!" she said recklessly. "You're mine now. Fancy three months together? I was only expecting a week!"

His face darkened.

"You may have me for the rest of your life—useless!"

"Not if you do what I ask. Why won't you, Piers?"

"Because I should feel a hypocrite. I haven't prayed for years. And then to go whining now," he muttered.

"Didn't you pray in the plane?"

He cast his mind back, and a startled look came into his face. He could hear himself breathing, "God, get us down safe!" as he circled over the runway for a second time.

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"In a vague sort of way," he admitted, and saw her smile.

"And Jesus answered your prayer. He wouldn't hurt you now. He couldn't, because He is love."

Silence followed, broken by a bee that blundered in and buzzed round the room, to find its way out. Piers was thinking of his father. Prayer hadn't mended his spine. But perhaps he hadn't been keen on living, with a woman so thoughtless and pleasure-loving as his wife. And here was Goldie, willing to be parted from her baby. What was he doing for her?

"All right," he brought out, jerkily. "I'll give it a try."

Taking his empty cup she put it on the tray, and hugged him.

"Now I know how much you love me," she said softly. "And I'm not afraid of the future." She became the nurse. "You must have a rest. I'll take the tea wagon out, so put up your feet, darling. Here's a cushion for your head."

He obeyed her willingly, sunk in the sudden weariness that found him unprepared. Soon it merged into sleep. Marigold stole out on tiptoe. She found Janet in the library, writing a letter to Michael. After a glance at the girl's face she rose, and opened her arms.

"His beautiful eyes," Marigold wailed, in that safe retreat. "Isn't it *cruel*?"

"Yes, but his sight may improve. There is a good chance of it when his nervous strength returns, and there you can help him, so don't grieve too much." She stroked the golden head against her breast. "I think he is charming! His smile—and such a lovely figure!" The girl looked up with a flash of pleasure. "I don't wonder you lost your heart to him. Even the Deaconess approves, though he gave her a snub on your behalf. She's relieved that he's so well-bred. This doesn't appeal to Amy!" She saw Marigold's faint smile, and ran on, "Does his uncle know you are married?"

"Yes, now." The girl freed herself and flicked a tear from her lashes. "I mustn't cry, not until he's gone. I let it out in my last letter, never guessing Sir George would read it aloud, and Piers couldn't warn me. He sent a notice to the papers, with the date; we shall see it in



*The Times* when they come." A dimple showed in her cheek. "Now he'll have to put in the birth! A good thing it wasn't in the next column. Rather a shock for his friends?"

She giggled, and Janet was thankful for the resilience of youth. Michael wouldn't take it so well, another postponement. He was expected at Muss in the following week, and she couldn't leave the island now. But why have a honeymoon, at their ages? Come straight back to the cottage. She caught Marigold's:

"I must go to him. He might wake!"

"And he ought to be off. His boatman won't wait for ever."

"Just ten minutes more?" Marigold pleaded, saw Janet smile, and ran from the room.

Softly as she opened the door, the long figure on the sofa stirred, a half-smile on his lips as he peered round.

"You there, darling?" He stretched his arms over his head, and yawned happily. "You don't know how fine it is to wake in a room by yourself! Not that there weren't good types in the ward, but so close, with the nattering and eternal radio. Come here!"

He sat up, and drew her on to his knee, although she protested:

"I'm too heavy!"

"I like it." After a moment he said, looking down at her hand, "I'll tell you something funny. You ought to have a wedding-ring!"

"We'll go to Muss in the launch and find one."

"Yes, there's the launch. I'd forgotten that, rather jolly. I shan't have to bring it back in a sponge-bag!"

Marigold laughed, running her fingers through his hair, short and crisp above the nape.

"Hi, stop! I can't stand that!" Piers squirmed. "Off you go! And so must I."

Amused, she watched him cross to the dressing-table and pick up her tortoiseshell brushes to smooth his dark head.

"Can I have a wash, my sweet?"

"In here." She showed him the bathroom. "Remember this?"

"Rather! Coming in soaked, and returning to you with a towel chastely——"

"Ssh! Nurse will hear you."

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"Next door? I'd better lock it, or she might have a surprise!"

This was so like the old Piers that Marigold knew Janet was right. Even this short sleep had refreshed him, and Baby would be safe with Nurse. She could hear Solange crooning to him on the lawn, happy now, for if Pierre joined the Free French they could be married. He did not know where his parents were, with the Germans swarming over the land, and they could lodge no further objection. Pierre had arranged to send her a wire from London to say he was safe, as well as her brother, and she could call him by his second name, Lucien, on her return from their wedding. For he wished her to remain on the island. Marigold was watching the pair when she heard a light step, and her husband's arm came round her shoulders.

"Is that the baby over there?" he asked, screwing up his eye.

"Yes, by Solange. He must come in soon for his bath and bed."

"Strips well, I should think! Hullo, Chump!" The spaniel was leaning with heavy affection against his legs, and Piers patted his head. "A wife, a baby, and a dog. What more could a man desire? I shall try to ring up my uncle to-night and give him the exciting news. He'll want to come up and see you both." His smiling expression changed. "How you went through it all I can't imagine."

"But I've always longed for a baby! The cow beat me by a head," she laughed. "I had sixpence on it with Polly and lost! In a frightful gale, the launch couldn't cross, and Aunt Janet brought Baby into the world, took the risk, as she isn't allowed to practise. But it was all right, Dr. McGregor an angel! You mustn't let her put off her wedding again. Uncle Michael is expected next week."

"We'll insist on it," Piers assured her. "I want to meet him. We must give her a good wedding present. What shall it be?"

"Well, I know one thing she wants. A wrist-watch; hers loses time."

"Then I'll write to our jewellers about it."

He had forgotten his disability, and Marigold said promptly:

"Do. I'll pay half! I've an allowance now."

At the pride in her voice he smiled, and kissed the top of her head.

"I must go, darling. But I'll be back to-morrow."

She saw him off from the jetty. The old boatman, well fed, was more amiable. Mrs. Brown had wisely told him of the secret marriage and he was looking forward to retailing the story in the bar to-night, drawing it out, his glass refilled, to wind up with the news that the airman was a laird in his own country. There would be talk about that hush-hush business on the Ram, a bare-faced excuse for courting. Someone would be sure to point out that punishment had followed for breaking the Lord's Day. There was Andy, too, who had let out the boat, now a prisoner of war, his ship sunk off the coast of Norway. Unaware of what was in preparation at the inn, as they swished through the water Piers looked back and waved to the vague blur behind him.

Janet met the girl in the hall, and sent her to bed for supper. She must not overdo it, or Dr. McGregor would scold them both, and the "heir" might suffer. She understood that allusion now, and so did the others. Passing the refectory door she heard Amy's voice, more Cockney than ever in her disgust. "Forgiven, because she'll be her lydy-ship!" The table was already full when the gong sounded; even the Gees had come up to hear the details, Ma delighted, and in the happy position of having been hostess to the bride. Polly had remembered the saying that marriages came in pairs and was thinking of her fisherman. Was he still in the village? Only the Opposition looked sour, Ruth casting malicious glances at Charlie, who had accepted the inevitable. When the meal was over Janet checked the company from rising:

"One minute! I have something to say to you all, about Flight Lieutenant Chomeley. You will have heard that a marriage took place last July, which has been legally proved. Sir George Chomeley, his uncle, with whom he lives, knows of this, is very pleased, and will probably come here. That is good news; now for the bad." She told the dramatic story of what had befallen the airman, and the terrible risk he had run, whilst the community listened with bated breath. He would probably receive a decoration. "I am sure you will agree with me,"

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Janet went on gravely, "that it is our duty to do all we can for him. He must have absolute quiet, is still suffering from the effect of shock, though he tries to hide it, and I mean to see he has every care. When he returns here to-morrow he will, naturally, live in his wife's suite for his three month's sick leave, and perhaps, longer." Janet paused, and looked down the table. "If there is anyone who objects to this, she must speak out now." There was no response, but she could see Amy whispering in Rachel's ear. "Will all those who approve hold up a hand?"

The first to be raised defiantly was Charlie's, and the others followed her lead, with three exceptions, the Deaconess, to Janet's surprise, Amy and Ruth. Janet attacked the teacher first:

"You wish to leave us, Amy?"

This was a new angle. But if the Deaconess were going—— Amy risked it.

"I certainly do. It's against all the rules Mrs. Mappin drew up. A man to live in the Castle! It's bad enough you tiking one to the cottage." Forgetting her own experience Amy added nastily, "A husband should be able to give his wife a home! The Deaconess could look after us, and we should be safe."

"I shouldn't dream of it," that lady said firmly. "Though I think you are right in leaving, Amy, when teachers are so urgently needed, and I might be able to help you there. A friend of mine with a large country house has given up the wing to children evacuated from London. Unfortunately, the village school is small and cannot find room for them all, so Lady Prendergast is looking for someone to undertake their education. With a salary, of course. She wrote to me, remembering my work at Stepney, to see if I could help her. It is a charming place, on the border of Wales, safe from air-raids." The Deaconess smiled at Amy. "I may be going there myself, later on, so we should meet."

Amy looked dubious. Teach, once more? Instead of being a lady-companion? She remembered her illusions about the Castle.

"Excuse me asking, but are servants kept?"

"A large staff, mostly over service age. The butler has been there twenty years. I am sure you would like Lady Prendergast, and find her both kind and generous." The

Deaconess became suave, but purposeful. "There would be no trouble about your earlier references, in a private capacity, but she must know without delay, and if she paid your fare she would expect you to stay."

"Yes. I understand that." Would it be a rise in life, Amy wondered. Her dear friend, the Deaconess, arriving as a visitor? She wobbled. "What about my clothes? I'm so shabby!"

"Then you'll be in the fashion. It's the country and you'd look peculiar in anything smart." Selina smiled sweetly. "You're just right as you are, in that jumper and skirt."

The jumper was a mustard-yellow, an insult to a sallow skin, which now took a tinge of beetroot from pleasure.

"Then I think I'll go. It's very naice of you, Deaconess. When would Lady P. want me?"

"As soon as possible. She will probably wire her decision."

"I'm going to Muss to-morrow," Janet put in. "I could post your letter, Deaconess."

"That would be excellent. Or I could wire," said Selina. "But if I recommend you, Amy, there must be no drawing back. You're certain you'd like to go to my friend?"

"Quaite." Almost a B.B.C. accent. "I shall enjoy teaching again, and I couldn't sty here with a clear conscience."

"That's settled, then," Janet, inwardly crowing, announced.

A clamour arose, Rachel arguing with her sister, and all eyes turned to the pair. Janet glanced sideways at Selina, wondering what her plans were. Impossible! She had winked, a discreet lowering of the lid, a little smile hovering on her lips.

"Dr. Janet!" It was Rachel's desperate voice. "Ruthie doesn't mean it."

"I'm going!" the hunchback bawled. "I won't stay here! I hate Marigold, making us all look such fools! I don't believe she's married at all!"

"Do be quiet," Rachel urged. "It's only she's upset, Dr. Janet. She'll stay."

"That depends on me," said Janet coldly. "I can't trust her. A woman of her age who could creep up and

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pinch a baby would have no scruples in playing a trick on a half-blind man."

"And that isn't all!" Charlie drowned Rachel's pleading, "She tried to scare Marigold in the wood going up to the farm. I saw it, and I told her if she did it again I'd drop her in the swimming pool."

"Held me over it, you beast!" Ruth exploded. "But I'll pay you out when we go. There'll be some pretty postcards for you!"

"That's a punishable offence," Miss Plowden said sternly. "I'm glad you warned us from whom they would come."

"You old creep!" Ruth threw at the governess, and Rachel's hand covered her mouth.

Here Nurse leaned forward.

"I'd like to report something else, Dr. Janet. I saw Ruth slip out of my patient's window a month before she was confined, so I had a good look, and I found a big worm in Marigold's bed."

A hiss of horror rose, and Janet asked:

"Why didn't you inform me, Nurse?"

"I punished Ruth myself, doctor. Charlie helped me."

Curiosity ran high, as the pair exchanged glances.

"That's right," said the electrician, grinning. "I held her whilst Clara poured it down. What them Fatchists do and it couldn't hurt her. I said any more tricks and she'd have a double dose!"

"Castor oil!" Mrs. Gee gasped. "Serve her right! A worm? It might have marked the child!"

"You wicked woman!" the silent Irene burst out.

"Feel sorry for her?" Ruth sneered. "Because you've had a brat yourself!"

"For shame!" Mrs. Gee turned on the hunchback.

"I-reen's a good girl, as we all know. I hope, Dr. Janet——"

"That's all right; no one believes her. Though it settles my determination."

"But we've nowhere to go," Rachel wailed.

"On the contrary. Last week when I pointed out how you were neglecting the linen you said that you ought to be paid." For somehow, the secret concerning Charlie and Irene had slipped out. "Also, that your cousin in Leeds would be glad to employ you, and take Ruth as well, two of her work girls joining the forces."

"It's not work I'm used to!" Rachel's temper was slipping. "Mrs. Mappin wouldn't have treated me like this. A good woman, and kept away from men! All because my poor little sister, who has so little pleasure in life——"

"That will do," Janet checked her. "I should like you to go before Flight Lieutenant Chomeley arrives. By the morning train to-morrow, so you'd better go up and pack. I will see you off and pay your fares, also, sufficient to keep you both for"—she paused—"three months, in case your cousin changes her mind. You should find work in that time, with so many younger women called up."

"If it comes to the worst," the Deaconess neighed. "There would probably be some kind lady who would give you both a home in return for a little housework and cooking."

"*Me?*" Rachel, furious, sprang up. "Go into service? I wouldn't demean myself!"

"But you've done it here," the Deaconess said mildly. "And I suppose in your own home."

"Very badly!" Mrs. Brown, in the doorway, tossed her head. "As a housekeeper I couldn't give her a reference."

"Come and pack!" Rachel ordered her sister. "I've had enough of this place! I'll be glad to shake the dust off my feet!"

Charlie followed them out, afraid they might go to Marigold, and her voice floated back:

"Better wash 'em first. That'd be a change for Ruthie!"

"Dear me," the Deaconess murmured. "I'm surprised! Still, I think you've acted wisely, Dr. Janet, under the circumstances."

Very noble of her, Janet thought; she was losing half her congregation.

"But yes! She is dangerous, ze leetle *bossue*," Solange remarked brightly. "And as to 'er sister, to call 'erself a dressmaker! *Mon Dieu!* She can only gobble!"

"Cobble," Miss Plowden corrected softly, and there were smiles round the table.

"Well,"—Janet rose—"it's nice to feel that everyone will help Marigold in her trouble. And now I see Mrs. Brown waiting for the table to be cleared."

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"I will help," said Amy graciously. "I'm afride you will be a little short-handed now."

The same idea had occurred to Janet. She must get help from the mainland. All the better! No more grumbling over unpaid work. Jean's little niece was ready and there must be other thrifty girls leaving school. Her plans were interrupted in the hall by a touch on her arm and Selina's voice:

"Come in here for a minute." She opened the library door, closed it behind them and smiled at Janet. "You do understand? It was the only way of getting rid of Amy, and I am so tired of her! I remember Father Ambrose at Stepney saying that converts could be very trying. She seems to think I've adopted her! I shall write privately to Lady Prendergast and warn her to be firm from the first. Amy will have plenty to do, entire charge of those dreadful children! Little hooligans from the East End, and no one will help my poor friend. She's in despair, so it will be a *double* charity."

Janet, laughing, seized her chance.

"We shan't miss her. But what about yourself, Deaconess?"

"I'm staying, of course! It was only to induce Amy. There will be so much to arrange. The christening, for instance. I expect Sir George will come up for it. Nice to meet him again. But I mustn't keep you, so good night, Dr. Janet." She held out her delicate hand. "I like Piers—a little abrupt, but that's the fault of the young generation—and I hope his sight may improve. I shall go to bed, as I don't feel up to a long talk with Amy." A flicker of mischief came into the full brown eyes. "I shall lock my door!"

She must have been pretty as a girl, Janet thought, surprised by this sudden revival of youth, and might be useful when Sir George arrived. Give a tone to the establishment! She had nearly reached the arched door when a figure emerged from the shadows beyond the staircase.

"Oh, it's you!" Janet greeted the gardener, and remembered her stricken face when Ruth had launched her accusation, overlooked by the others in Mrs. Gee's loud defence. "Want to speak to me?"

"Please, Dr. Janet." Irene looked cautiously down the passage, and drew closer. "'Twas true what Ruth said.



But I couldn't help it. Two soldiers in a wood. I was only sixteen, and I couldn't fight them both."

"You poor child!" Janet's face was warm with pity. "What a wicked thing to happen! You were alone?"

"Yes, picking bluebells. I didn't know either, though Dad wouldn't believe me. Mum was dead, or she'd have taken my part, but Dad couldn't bear the shame, him being so well thought of at chapel. So he sent me away to an old cousin in the Midlands and pretended I'd gone into service." Janet's air of compassion had unlocked the girl's stubborn tongue. "My baby was born in the infirmary, but I had to put her out to go to work, and she died." Irene's face was wistful. "I wish she'd lived. She had six toes instead of five. I was scared of men, so I came here. Mrs. Mappin said she wouldn't tell."

"She kept her word, so don't worry about Ruth's wild shot. No one believed her, and she's going." Janet saw this was not all. "You're not afraid of Marigold's husband, surely?"

"No. I was watching him through the peas, and I heard what he said. He's fond of her—looks delicate, too. So I'll stay, if you want me?"

"I do." Janet drew the girl nearer and kissed her, to the gardener's surprise. "We couldn't get on without you, my dear."

"Thank you, Dr. Janet." Irene lingered. "There'll be enough sparrergrass for him and her to-morrow. The young carrots have come on nicely, but the new potatoes are late." A pause. "I'd like some rain for the lettuces, though the slugs are eating them. Rain would be good for the peas, too——"

Janet waited patiently, wondering how long the list would be, unwilling to check Irene, the vegetables her children.

"You're a splendid gardener," she brought out at the end.

"Dad learned me, and kept me at it."

He would, thought Janet savagely.

"I used to wash the veg. for market," Irene proceeded. "That meant being up early. Cold it were sometimes, and if his tea weren't ready he'd cuff my head, and call me a child of sin. Still, I like anything to do with the soil. It pays you back better than most."

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"Yes, nice to see things growing. Mr. Chaytor says you have 'green fingers.'"

"Does he, now?" Irene was pleased. "I had a peep at him, too, when he passed. Looked steady, I thought. As he should be, marrying you."

Digesting this doubtful compliment, Janet wished the girl good night, assuring her that her secret was safe, and entered the suite, where Marigold, in bed, was studying a catalogue of a summer sale. She put a finger to her lips, with a glance at the cot.

"Isn't this frock pretty?" she breathed, and pointed to the design, as Janet took the chair beside her. "Piers would like it."

"Would he?" Janet smiled. "It's cheap, and will wash, so I think we might run to one more. We mayn't get them later on."

"You darling! I shall wear his stockings to-morrow. Won't they feel funny? And his R.A.F. brooch." The girl raised her shining eyes to Janet's indulgent face. "I'm happier now, as I know it will all come right."

She did not explain, but Janet guessed the source of her faith.

"I've been making things easier. Amy's going!"

"Never!" Marigold caught her arm. "How?"

Janet told her, and watched the waves of mirth pass over her excited face, her laughter controlled because of the baby.

"It's too funny! Fancy Cousin Selina winking! Do you know what Amy did yesterday crossing the lawn?" Marigold giggled. "Put her arm round Cousin Selina's waist! That must have finished it. The adopted child? Rachel will miss her; they've been very thick lately."

"She'll have no chance. Rachel and Ruth are going to-morrow."

"What? A clean sweep? How ever did you do it?" Marigold listened, spellbound, to the story of Ruth's insurrection. "Won't Anna be pleased? Farewell to the pest!" After a moment the girl added, "You'll keep in touch with them, Aunt Janet? I wouldn't like them to starve."

"You needn't be afraid," Janet murmured, and kissed her. "Still, I think I've done right. Piers must have all

the peace he needs, and I couldn't trust Ruth. She's deformed in mind as well as in body."

"Yes. I can't get over her pinching Baby! I found the marks on his poor little arm." The girl's face became thoughtful. "Isn't it difficult to forgive one's enemies, Aunt Janet? Especially, when they hurt people you love." But with all this excitement she could not be serious for long. "I wish Anna were here. She *would* enjoy it!"

Anna was lying on the beach, listening to Piers. They had made friends over supper, and he had found her cool common sense refreshing; the sort of woman you could talk to without any nonsense. Primed by the landlady, she had carved the cold fowl without giving him any choice in the matter, for instinct had warned her that Piers would resent pity. A man, not a weakling, though, poor lad, how jumpy he was! It had been her suggestion to exchange the hot room and the stale smell of beer from the bar for the air off the sea, and he had agreed, remembering how good she had been to his Goldie. It was peaceful, with the tide coming in, as the long northern dusk embraced the night.

He broke a friendly silence, referring to an earlier conversation:

"I like gypsies. I used to talk to them at our horse fair at Horncastle. My uncle declares they're the only race that still holds part of the ancient mysteries. Anyhow, they're amazing with horses. We've an old man in our stables whose mother was a gypsy. He taught me to jump, and some very useful tricks. My uncle allows him to keep an old lurcher"—Piers smiled—"and they go for moonlight strolls. The gamekeepers don't like him! But the maids do, always begging him to look in their tea-cups! Did you have your fortune told?"

"Yes, before I left. They became friendly when they found I had crooked little fingers. One of my grandmothers was a Lovel, and my father was proud of his gypsy blood, said it drew him nearer to Nature. He was a landscape painter—in his spare time, poor dear! With five children he thought it wiser to teach at a School of Art. That's where I learnt all I know, though I haven't his talent."

"He must have been jolly good, then." Propped on an

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elbow, Piers was running pebbles through his fingers, enjoying the cool touch. "Is there any chance of my buying that picture of the gypsy encampment?"

He had the barest idea of it, for the light indoors had been poor, only the bright touches of colour.

"Not a hope!" Anna smiled at his surprise. "I was thinking of offering it to you as a little wedding present. Rather late, but that's your fault!"

"How wizard! I should love to have it." He saw her expression change, and added, "If you are sure you can spare it?"

"That or another," she said lightly. "You might prefer one of Marigold's home?"

"Good idea." He was intrigued. Some superstitious touch? "Was the fortune exciting?"

"Very much so, at the start. From an old gypsy woman, who looks eighty, but still has black hair, with big gold rings in her ears. She took me into her caravan and produced a greasy pack of cards, which I shuffled and cut. Laying them out she began, 'Painting isn't your proper work; not what you started with. But you'll return to the other. There's success for you there.'"

"At the Bar?" Piers asked eagerly, for in the wood long ago Marigold had told him Anna's story.

"I hope so, though it doesn't seem possible at present. Unless"—Anna paused, watching a little wave break on the beach below them—"the rest comes true. For the gypsy went on, 'There's money coming to you from over the water, though you don't expect it.' And drew out a King of Diamonds. 'From this man, might be of your blood. He's old and rich, with a bad heart. Lonely, too, as his wife is dead and his only son has been killed. He's in a hot land, not a cloud in the sky, among sheep, more than you could count. It won't be just yet, but it's coming.'"

"Weren't you thrilled?" Piers asked, watching the thin, clever face by his side.

"No, rather sceptical!" Anna smiled at Piers. "It had a familiar ring, 'money from over the sea.' Still, the flesh being weak, coming home I tried to think of a rich relation, a rarity in my family. The only one that came to my mind was a distant cousin of my father's, who looked us up on a visit from Australia. Rather a rough diamond, and

my father didn't take to him, because he ran us down, said he wouldn't have a Britisher on his sheep station."

"Sheep? Then that's it!" How cool she seemed about it, Piers thought, unaware of Anna's strong self-control. "Did he take a fancy to you?"

"I was too young to notice, but my mother told me later on that I amused him. He asked us all what we'd like for a present—one of my brothers mentioned a bicycle! When it came to my turn I said, 'Sixpence for a tin of toffee. If you can spare it?'" Anna chuckled. "Sixpence meant a lot in those days."

"I'll bet he remembered it! A rich man gets pestered for money, and it must have been a pleasant change. Children are often greedy. I know my young nephews are. One of them is my godson, and always reminding me of the fact! But my sister puts him up to it, so one can't blame the boy." Piers gave Anna a wicked smile. "The joke is, she hopes if anything happens to me he'll be my uncle's heir, and now Goldie's spoilt that little game!"

"How very satisfactory." Anna looked thoughtful. "And you might have more children. Would this be a shock?"

"Not if Goldie wants them." Piers hesitated for a moment, the light dying out of his face. "They could have fun together." Although he might not join in it. "Did you all get your presents?"

"Yes, even to the bicycle! Then the cousin went away, and we never heard from him again." Anna put up a hand, with a smear of paint on the cuff, to brush back a strand of hair that the fitful breeze had blown over her eyes. It cut off the distant view of the island, with the dark Castle rising up against a lapis-lazuli sky. Should she tell him? A vain hope, perhaps. Reason said no, but instinct prevailed. "The rest of the fortune wouldn't interest you, except one queer thing." She was careful not to look at Piers. "The gypsy picked out a Knave of Clubs, and told me, 'You'll be meeting a stranger soon. He's young, and in trouble, though it isn't as bad as he thinks. There's happiness before him.'"

She could feel the man stir, and was not surprised when he asked huskily:

"Is that true?"

"On my honour. The gypsy went on: 'He'll be mixed

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up with you, but he's only a friend.' Lifting a Queen of Hearts, she put it on the Knave, saying: 'This is the lady of his heart, young and fair. She'll be his light. And she'll give him two . . . three . . . four children. Cut again, dearie.' So I did, and she turned the two packs, with the Knave of Clubs on the top of one. 'There he is! I can see him plainly. He's on a fine horse.'"

Anna's beautifully modulated voice died away, one with the gentle note of the tide, whilst Piers steadied his.

"That sounds good."

He was gazing over the dark waters to Rual, lost in a mist, but still there to the eyes of faith.

THE END

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